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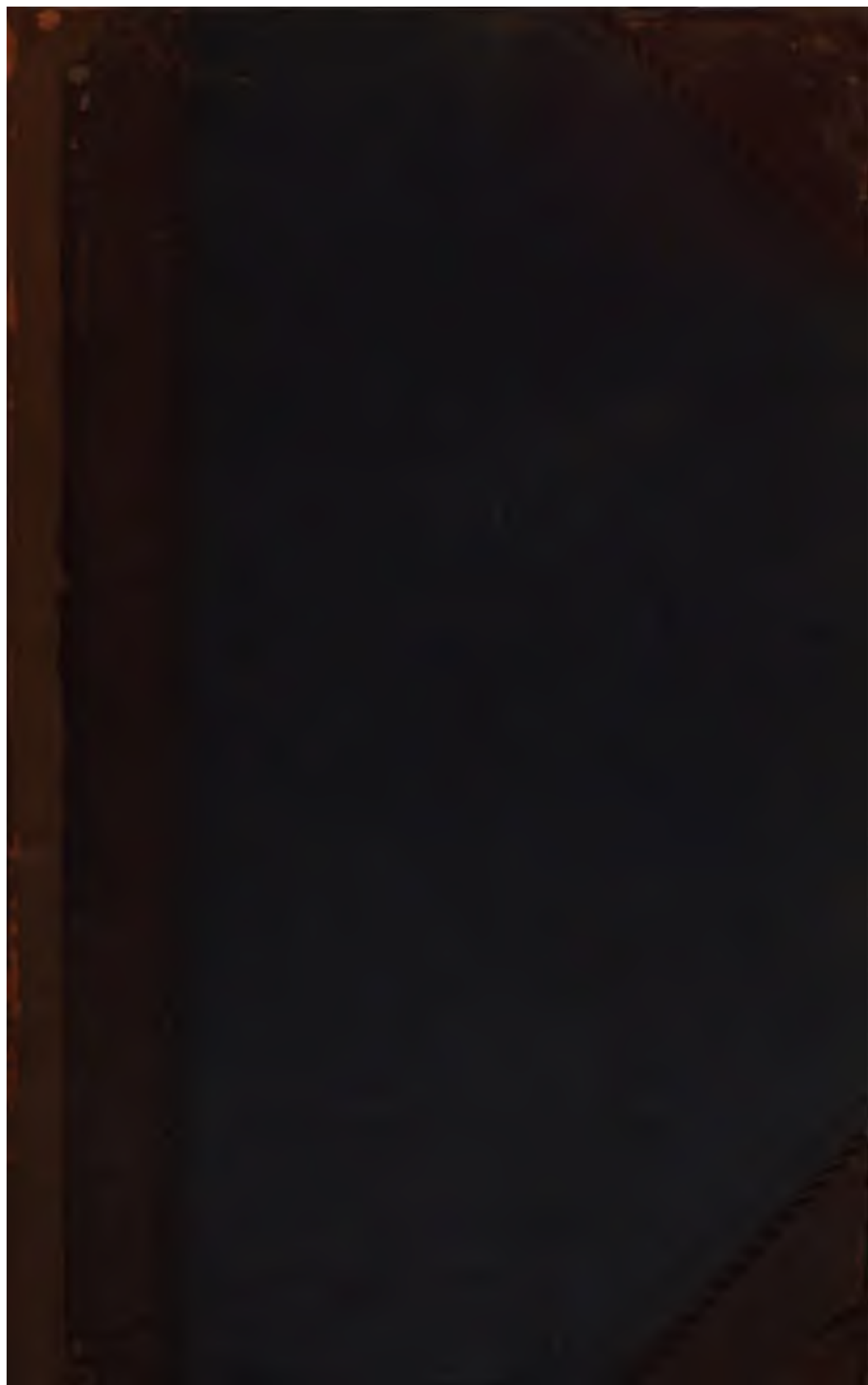
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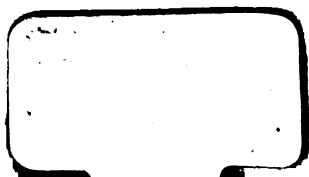
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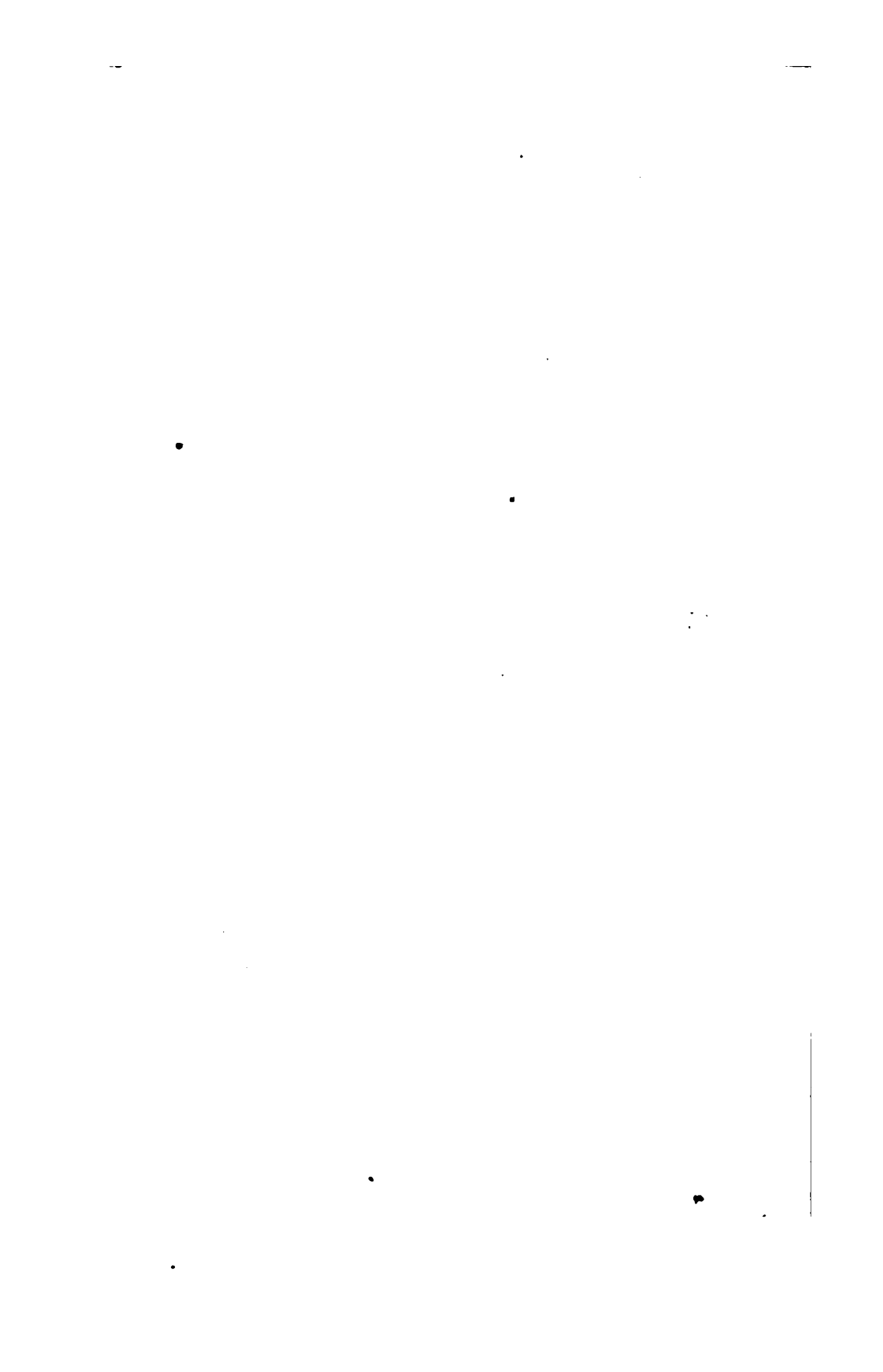
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THE
P O E T R Y
OF
THE PENTATEUCH.

BY THE
REV. JOHN HOBART CAUNTER, B.D.

INCUMBENT MINISTER OF ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL, ST. MARYLEBONE;
AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF THANET.

IN
TWO VOLUMES.
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PREFACE.

No one can be more fully aware than myself of the serious importance of the subjects embraced in these volumes, and of the extent of capacity required to do them even ordinary justice; still, with all the consciousness which I feel of powers too narrowly circumscribed, I nevertheless cannot but encourage the hope that I have not spent upon those subjects in vain a very long period of severe and anxious labour. This labour has been pursued steadily and earnestly, with a fervent desire to be useful in my vocation; and though I may be far from realizing my whole aim in this respect, I cannot bring myself to anticipate the possibility of entire failure. There is a wide interval betwixt failure and success, and I trust I shall be found to have occupied some portion of this interval, however far I may be from the last desirable extreme, reached indeed by few of the numerous competitors who frequently devote the whole energy of their minds to its attainment.

The field upon which I have entered, though not altogether new, is certainly one that has been comparatively little trodden, and this only by men of profound erudition, who have rendered it almost exclusive ground, and so hedged it round with recondite speculations and philological subtleties as to exclude many who, had it been rendered accessible to them, would have gladly entered upon so rich a domain to enjoy the ripe harvest of its invaluable produce. My

desire has therefore been to lay it open to the spiritual enjoyment of the ordinary wayfarer—to make it common property, where every earnest christian may not only behold, but likewise go and gather. I offer this as a work to general readers, though I trust it may be likewise acceptable to the better instructed. I have endeavoured to avoid as much as possible any appearance of dry and recondite inquiry, always repulsive, and indeed utterly barren to minds which have not been severely disciplined in literary investigation: it will however be at once seen that the subjects embraced in these volumes could not be treated in a manner level with the humblest capacity, especially where references are of necessity occasionally made to works of a very elaborate and deeply learned character; still I think it will be found that the matter has been generally kept free from the meshes of those dry theological abstractions, amid the entanglements of which so many pious and ingenuous minds are bewildered, instead of becoming enlightened.

If I have sometimes ventured to differ from the views of profound and acknowledged scholars, I have invariably done so with becoming respect and with a perfect conviction of my own great inferiority; at the same time with the assurance that a vastly inferior mind may chance to discover what has escaped the penetration of one far more highly gifted.

I may be permitted to remark, as a philosophical truth common to the experience of the most ordinary scrutiny, that great minds are made up of great and little elements, and little minds, on the contrary, of little and great, the first named quality in each respectively predominating; so that no mind is necessarily or consequentially either exclusively great or exclusively little. The most limited experience will show that little thoughts may occur to a great mind, and great thoughts to a little mind, though the qualities of greatness and of littleness are in an inverse

ratio in each. The mind is a compound agent of strength and feebleness, the latter being doubtless commonly the major quality; it may then happen that I have thrown light upon some passages of the Mosaic Scriptures which our most learned commentators have failed to relieve from the embarrassments of that obscurity under which those Scriptures are acknowledged to lie. The merest clown employed in picking stones in the fields may communicate from his experience, however restricted, to the information of the sage, drawing from the exhaustless treasures of knowledge, though with a feeble hand, his almost viewless mite, and adding it to the vast stores of the philosopher.

It will be found in the ensuing pages that I have generally adhered to the reading of our venerable version, and have maintained with my best endeavours its truly extraordinary and almost undeviating integrity. Upon the whole, I am convinced it will never be surpassed, most probably never equalled; for although here and there, in other versions which have been attempted of particular portions of the Sacred Writings, improvements have been occasionally made, yet, taken completely, they invariably fall short of our authorized translation in the great cardinal qualities of the original—condensation, vigour, and simplicity.

The object of those pious and eminently learned men, who contributed their aid to perfect that translation of the Holy Scriptures sanctioned by the Church of England, evidently was, to give the original in its greatest possible purity and in its most literal form; thus, by presenting the naked but robust ideas of the Hebrew, without embellishment, rigidly adhering to their honest desire of preserving the germ and sap, rather than of exhibiting the leaf and blossom, they have frequently, when they were no doubt unconscious of so doing, preserved the poetical structure, at the same time that they have transfused the spirit as well

as the sense, though occasionally it may be at the sacrifice of much of the graceful and beautiful efflorescence of the natural production: for it must necessarily happen that in a literal transfusion from one language to another, especially from an extremely ancient to an extremely modern one, much of the poetical beauty, where poetry exists, must be marred; and there can be no question that in the splendour of its poetical adornments, our version, admirable and almost perfect as it is, falls infinitely short of the original.

If the over-fastidious critic should happen to find in these volumes many errors, false views, doubtful interpretations, misapprehensions of verbal construction, bold assumptions, and what may appear to him barren conclusions,—still I trust he will not be backward to allow me credit for whatever may deserve it, and I cannot but think that he will discover something to commend, for I can hardly persuade myself that honest intentions, directing the patient labours of years, should lead to the production of no good fruit. I can only say, I have desired, I have assiduously endeavoured, to do good, and may God's mercy crown my desires and endeavours with their hoped-for success!

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THE
POETRY OF THE PENTATEUCH.

CHAPTER I.

Poetry probably coeval with the Creation. Intellectual superiority of the primitive races. Music and poetry among the very first inventions of man. The earliest literary compositions poetical. Poetry of the Hebrew scriptures. Its influence upon the poet Shelley. The peculiar province of poetry. Its antiquity proved from the fourth chapter of Genesis.

POETRY is an art which we are justified in supposing to be almost coeval with the Creation; because, through the sacred writings, we can trace it to a period long antecedent to the universal deluge; and there are likewise strong natural grounds for the support of such a belief. When we consider that man was first brought into this world in the plenitude of a vigorous and expansive intellect, his mind actuated and directed by celestial influences, being fresh and unspotted from the hands of his Creator, and distinguished by personal communion with Him;

his heart open to the purest effluences of virtue, and sublimed by the holy communications of innocence, in a world where sin had then no existence—

A creature, who, not prone
And brute, as other creatures, but endued
With sanctity of reason, might erect
His stature, and upright, with front serene,
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heaven ;—

when we consider that the first man was produced in the highest maturity of reason; his body full of healthy and robust life; his mind, under such a beautiful and all-wise dispensation, equal to the sustentation of the deepest and subtlest processes of thought,—for the Deity would not have created a rational being otherwise than gifted with the most consummate faculties of intellect; complete in all the circumscribed attributes assigned to those faculties by that God who had just placed the great progenitor of our race, the pride of his creation, the masterpiece of his Almighty workmanship, in a place of unlimited enjoyment—of enjoyment precisely adapted to an unsinning agent, to whom no impure pleasure was known, and, until corrupted by sin, utterly unsusceptible of such pleasure;—when from this grand induction of particulars we force our thoughts backwards, through the long lapse of ages, into that earthly paradise where the first sentient creature was placed, perfect and pre-eminent, how completely does it realize that beautiful summary of human excellence

from the pen of our immortal Shakspeare—
 “What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!” It is moreover asserted by Plato, that the first man was φιλοσοφωτατος, the greatest of philosophers, which would seem to prove that the Greek sage was not ignorant of the Mosaic account of man’s origin. It is but a natural inference from this account, that Adam was a person eminently gifted, his intellectual faculties being no less transcendent than his moral, which he then possessed in their full perfection. Such a being, coming from his Maker’s hands pregnant with divine communications and beaming with the untarnished lustre of that Maker’s image, without a single antagonist quality, either spiritual or carnal, mental or physical, would surely be endowed with intellectual capabilities nothing inferior to those of the greatest and wisest men who have proceeded from him, under the degradation, and its consequent defalcations, of a broken covenant. There was nothing within the compass of mental acquirement beyond the reach of such a mind, and it is but natural to suppose that, conscious of its vast resources, the primitive races, the immediate descendants of the first and most highly endowed man, would not fail to draw upon those resources for any rational enjoyment which they were capable of affording. Then

Who would lose,
 Though full of pain, this intellectual being—
 Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
 To perish rather, swallowed up and lost
 In the wide womb of uncreated night,
 Devoid of sense and motion ?

The sister arts 'of music and poetry were no doubt among the first, if they were not the very first, inventions of man. The earliest inhabitants of the world, as I have endeavoured to show, were unquestionably men highly endowed and fully capable of availing themselves of that vast mental energy with which the Creator had blessed them,—for there is no just reason to suppose that sin, though it deadened or paralyzed the moral faculty, had any immediate or positive influence in abridging the intellectual. The one might exist in the full and bright maturity of its power, while the other was emasculated by the fearful accession of that destructive agent which the treacherous author of human delinquency first introduced into paradise. It does not follow as a natural consequence of the fall, that the mind is enfeebled because the heart is corrupted; for if this were the case, the best men would be the wisest—a moral consequence contrary to the experience of all times. We frequently see talent of a high order united with great depravity, proving that if the ascendancy of mind is freed from the control of virtue, which ever fructifies from the seeds of religion, the heart will not be improved, but on the contrary debased. This, however, is not the effect of mind upon matter, but of matter upon mind; not limiting its power

or narrowing its resources, but tainting the moral channels through which it flows, and thus impregnating it with the elements of spiritual mischief.

There can be little doubt that the earliest literary compositions were poetical, as all the original fragments, of which there are several introduced by Moses into the Pentateuch, are of this character;—it was, moreover, the form most consonant to the taste and circumstances of a primitive race, whose fancies would be naturally luxuriant, partaking as they did of the perfection of the recent mundane creation, in proportion as they were attracted by the rich productions of a young and exuberant world, and not fettered by the scholastic discipline introduced in remoter times, when the pristine earth had been deformed and crippled by the deluge, and the stern appliances of reason prevailed over the more sportive exertations of fancy. It may not, therefore, be altogether beside our purpose to inquire into the causes of the early influence of poetry, and of its application to sacred themes. We shall thus the more readily apprehend why it was so extensively employed by the inspired writers; the book of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Solomon's Song, and by far the larger portion of the prophecies, being decidedly poetical.

"Poetry," says Dacier, a critic of great taste and erudition, "is the offspring of religion;" and Plato affirms of it, that it awakens the spiritual empire of the soul. Such being its character and influence, can we feel surprised

that it was employed so largely by the sacred writers, as an agent to infuse such feelings of reverence towards God, and benevolence towards man, as those sublime compositions, of which they were the inspired authors, are so well calculated to engender? Take the poetry of the Hebrew scriptures where you will, and it abounds in these divine records, it incomparably surpasses that of any mere human production. Its variety is unbounded, its richness inexhaustibly copious, and its eloquence sublime. This has been admitted by persons who have denied altogether the inspiration of those scriptures. As one proof of this, among many, I have been assured by a person intimately acquainted with the late Percy Bysshe Shelley, a name deservedly classed among the greatest poets of the nineteenth century, that this highly endowed, but misguided genius, considered the sacred volume as unequalled by any other work, in any language, in the riches of its poetry. He always carried with him a small pocket edition of the Bible when he travelled; and it is said that one was found upon the body when recovered from the waves, in which so unhappy a career was terminated. It is sadly to be lamented that so fine a taste, a mind so exquisitely alive to the beautiful and sublime, should so readily have discovered both in the Bible, and yet have failed to perceive the inspiration of that divine book, the universal presence of the former leading, as it does, so convincingly to the irrefragable proof of the latter.

“Poetry,” says Bishop Lowth, “in its rude

origin and commencement, being derived from nature, was in time improved by art, and applied to the purposes of utility and delight. For, as it owed its birth to the affections of the mind, and had availed itself of the assistance of harmony, it was found, on account of the exact and vivid delineations of the objects which it described, to be excellently adapted to the exciting of every internal emotion, and making a more forcible impression upon the mind than abstract reasoning could possibly effect. It was found capable of interesting and affecting the senses and passions, of captivating the ear, of directing the perception to the minutest circumstances, and of assisting the memory in the retention of them. Whatever, therefore, deserved to be generally known and accurately remembered, was, by those men who on this very account were denominated wise, adorned with a jocund and captivating style, illuminated with the varied and splendid colouring of language, and moulded into sentences, comprehensive, pointed, and harmonious. It became the peculiar province of poetry to depict the great, the beautiful, the becoming, the virtuous; to embellish and recommend the precepts of religion and virtue; to transmit to posterity excellent and sublime actions and sayings; to celebrate the works of the Deity, his beneficence, his wisdom; to record the memorials of the past, and the predictions of the future. In each of these departments, poetry was of singular utility, since before any characters expressive of sounds were invented, at least

before they were received and applied to general use, it seems to have afforded the only means of preserving the rude science of early times; and, in this respect, to have rendered the want of letters more tolerable: it seems also to have acted the part of a public herald, by whose voice each memorable transaction of antiquity was proclaimed and transmitted through different ages and nations."* Lactantius states, that poets preceded philosophers by some ages, and before the name of philosopher was known, were called wise men.

That poetry was an art with which the earliest inhabitants of the earth were familiar, may be gathered from the fact, that in the fourth chapter of Genesis, Lamech, the father of Jubal, addresses his wives in verse, the twenty-third and twenty-fourth divisions of that chapter comprising a certain number of hemistichs, or broken verses, so artificially disposed as to produce a clear metrical rhythm, which is, to a certain extent, conveyed in our authorized translation of the Hebrew scriptures. It is the earliest specimen of Hebrew poetry extant. How Moses received it, whether from oral tradition, or from documentary authority, is a matter of no moment. It is sufficient that he has recorded it, and the internal evidence which it bears of being an original fragment of antediluvian poetry, seems to have satisfied all reasonable inquirers. Bishop Jebb, indeed, questions the existence of Hebrew metres, but with

* See Lowth's Fourth Prælection.

all due deference to so respectable a name, the whole structure of the poetical portions of the inspired volume, that is of those portions generally assumed to be poetical, is at once so obviously constructive and artificial, so obedient to certain given laws of composition, that it is impossible not to perceive a distinction so decidedly marked and broad between them and the prose portions as almost to admit of a direct contrast. Let any one, for instance, read the short introduction to the first chapter of Isaiah's prophecies, contained in the first verse of that chapter, according to the division of our English version; let him then proceed to the second verse, and he will be immediately conscious that he has passed from prose to poetry. He cannot fail to perceive quite a different order in the structure of the phraseology; he will, in short, be sensible of the presence of translated verse.

CHAPTER II.

Probable causes of the invention of music. Music shown to have existed before the flood. How poetry probably originated. The limited vocabulary of a first language a natural cause of its production. Figurative forms of expression necessary to such a language, which especially and of necessity constitute the grand elements of poetry. Why poetry was employed by the Hebrew writers.

I HAVE said that the sister arts of music and poetry were no doubt among the first, if not the very first inventions of man. The primitive race, which I presume will be readily granted, being in the ripe enjoyment of surpassing mental powers, the charms of music could not escape their perceptions; for the whole creation was one vast instrument of the most perfect and consummate adjustment, through the entire frame of which the voice of universal harmony vibrated. They saw its effect upon the brute creation. "The morning stars"—and this expression refers to created intelligencies then existing—had "sung together" to commemorate the excellence of a new-formed world. The artless quiristers of the woods and fields were perpetually pouring out their rapturous melodies, as if with instinctive consciousness, to the Great Author of their being. Man thus,

hearing every where around him the transcendent harmonies of Nature, would, almost as a matter of course, be induced to apply the resources of his mind to the invention of an art calculated to create so much delight; and from numberless prototypes in creation, all establishing a certain symphonious concordancy which filled the soul with a pure transport of holy joy, he would be almost instinctively led to produce artificial combinations of sounds bearing certain affinities to the exemplars which suggested them, and from which he was constantly deriving so much innocent gratification.

The elements of music are obvious in every living thing capable of effecting by sound the spontaneous utterance of sensations and perceptions, not to be conveyed by language; nevertheless sufficiently intelligible to guide to the meaning of the dumb object which utters it. These elements therefore being found susceptible of application to artificial modes of harmony, were no doubt so applied very shortly after the expulsion from Paradise; for we are assured, upon inspired authority, that Jubal, the seventh in descent from Adam by his eldest son Cain, "was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ;"* and it is incongruous to suppose that where music had attained to so high a degree of perfection, poetry could have had no existence. Of the influence of both, we have the recorded testimony of some among the most distinguished sons of Genius. Our

* Genesis iv. 21.

immortal Dryden furnishes his voucher in favor of music, in the following exquisite lines:—

What passion cannot music raise and quell!
 When Jubal struck the chorded shell
 His listening brethren stood around
 And, wondering, on their faces fell
 To worship that celestial sound.
 Less than a God they thought there could not dwell
 Within the hollow of that shell
 That spoke so sweetly and so well :—
 What passion cannot music raise and quell!

As music, which I apprehend had the precedence of poetry as a human invention, was regulated by certain principles of art, when words came to be adapted these latter would of course be likewise regulated by similar principles. The measured cadences therefore of musical expression may be presumed to have first suggested the idea of metrical harmony, and to have evolved the elements out of which every order of verse subsequently derived its existence. But poetry, as it improved and ripened towards maturity, rose above the trammels in which music had originally shackled it, and becoming disassociated from its parent art, sprang up and ramified into an almost endless variety of production, leaving all other mental processes at an immeasurable distance behind it, and becoming a universal agent of the purest mental enjoyment.

In the infancy of language, when words were no doubt limited to the natural wants of mankind, for their artificial wants were few, complex ideas must have been expressed by complex combinations of phrases. Simple and definite

ideas, as they were amplified into the complex, or subtilized into the abstract, would suggest corresponding structures of expression. The signs of simple ideas would be multiplied, and made to convey a latitude of acceptation beyond the literal interpretation. Natural objects would be the images of artificial; the concrete would be the vehicle of the abstract; types and symbols would suggest themselves to the mind, by which things tangible and perceptible would become the representatives of things intangible and occult. For instance, a stone, not being the ready recipient of external impressions, might easily dictate a form of speech to characterise the disposition of one whose sympathies were too stubborn to be easily awakened, and thence would naturally accrue the metaphor of a stony heart, to indicate a person void of sensibility. But besides, those figures by which the mind is prone, as it were, to typify its ideas or to emblazon them in the strong colouring of figurative expression, are always far more agreeable than bald, literal phrases, those inartificial instruments of communicating thought, which only convey the ideas as they first arise to the apprehension in their native simplicity and homeliness.

The human mind, it should be remembered, is not a gross mechanical agent, subject to the guiding influence of a mere calculated or ascertained force, but an infinitely plastic principle, and by means of an almost omnipotent faculty, the imagination, speaking relatively to finite things, is continually carried into new

trains of thought, apart from those suggested by such definite objects as meet the eye, or present only simple ideas to the mind; consequently, forms of expression, as various as the transitive, but perpetually diversified, colourings of thought, were originally sought for and found in order to convey to the mental perceptions of others the exact impressions produced by the imaginative faculty of those who were the most largely endowed with it.

In the first ages of the world, therefore, when the rude idioms of speech were confined to a very limited vocabulary, we may well conceive that it was necessary to employ, in various ways, the vocal signs then in use in order to express those mental conceptions which were far more copious and varied than the words at that time existing to embody and communicate them. We know that whilst ideas may be almost infinitely multiplied, the range of expression by words is circumscribed within comparatively narrow limits, and it is only by varying the acceptation of similar terms, by applying to them figurative as well as literal meanings, by extending the interpretation of synonymes, and multiplying those meanings of which they are the tokens, that we can render the resources of language at all adequate to the demands made upon it by our thoughts when we would communicate them in their full force and most expressive emphasis of signification.

Before language had been enriched by a multiplication of terms, derived from channels

which subsequently branched into various fruitful streams from the one parent fountain, the simplest expressions would, as a matter of course, be employed, and these would as naturally be multiplied, to meet the exigencies of a barren vocabulary, not by the invention of new words, but by new combinations, or by new applications of the words already in use, as the fancy operated in colouring the idea to be expressed. Thus the seeds of rhetorick, as well as of poetry, were sown in the earliest era of human existence, and from these have grown and ripened the noblest fruits of eloquence—those which once enlightened the Athenian Areopagus, and the Roman Forum, as well as those which have since sprung up within the walls of the British Senate-House. If we had no other proof of the mental supremacy of the primitive race than the invention of language, its nice adaptation to the capacity, and its ready adjustment to the demands of thought, we have sufficient assurance that the intellectual endowments of Adam and his immediate descendants must have been of a very rare order.

“When first mankind,” says Seutonium, “emerged from a state of barbarism into the habits of civilized life, and began to be acquainted in some measure with their own nature and that of the Gods, they contented themselves with a moderate style of living, and a language just proportioned to their wants. Whatever was grand or magnificent in either, they dedicated to their deities. As, therefore,

they built temples more elegant by far than their own habitations, and made the shrines and images of their divinities much larger than the human form, so they thought it necessary to celebrate them in a style of greater majesty than common, in language more splendid, harmonious, and agreeable. This species of composition, because it assumed a certain distinct form, was called a poem, from the word *ποίησις*, and those who cultivated it were called poets." This extract is from the fragment quoted by Isodorus.

Experience fully proves that the more uncultivated a people, the more attached are they to figurative forms of expression, and this undoubtedly arises from the poverty of their vocabulary, as has been already shown, rendering it necessary that they should employ the comparatively few terms known to them in a figurative as well as in a literal sense; and figurative expressions being one of the essential principles of poetry, this would fairly and abundantly justify the conclusion already drawn, that poetry must have been almost coeval with speech. We cannot be surprised then, that it was so largely employed by the sacred writers, and especially that it should have become the medium of conveying the sublime inspirations of prophecy, rising as it does in elevation of language, and in the power of conveying strong impressions, above the tamer and more literal phraseology of prose. The very constituents of poetry, in which the words are often rather the symbols of thought than

its literal representatives, seem naturally to bear a more kindred relation to those lofty emanations of the divine mind through the human, delivered by the lips of God's inspired ministers; and though in our authorized version of Holy Writ, these bear the form, they certainly are not invested with the language of ordinary prose, as we shall readily perceive when we come to consider the poetry of the Pentateuch. In this depository of divine wisdom we shall discover proofs that the authors of the various portions there introduced by Moses, as evidently the productions of other hands, were familiar with the richest resources of the poetic art, having left to posterity imperishable monuments of their genius, unequalled but by similar productions in the Sacred Records.

The great object of poetry is, according to that eminent Roman poet and critic, Horace, to instruct or to please—"aut prodesse velunt aut delectare poetæ," and is consequently a vehicle more successfully resorted to than simple prose, to communicate lofty sentiments and sublime impressions. It is however, unquestionably, the language of passion and of emotion, of whatever kind, not so readily signified by the common forms of speech. All those figures employed by dialecticians to express the different resources which especially belong to poetry as an art, and are now established as canons of rhetorick, have, in fact, grown out of the former, and are almost its exclusive property, because they so essentially heighten the expression of passion and emotion. As then

the province of poetry is to impart pleasure while it conveys instruction, to animate and enliven the soul by glowing images and exalted associations, it is undoubtedly a more successful vehicle than prose, to which such gratifications infinitely less belong, for the communication of elevated sentiments and the suggestion of sublime reflections. The language of poetry is, indeed, not unfrequently transferred to prose, which it is fitly calculated to embellish, though it does not often well become it, for the purpose of exciting in the soul fervors not to be produced by the employment of those ordinary terms of a mere literal phraseology, which represent the naked idea without colouring, the fact without embellishment, or the argument without illustration.

Du Bos, an elegant French critic, who died in the early part of the eighteenth century, contends that poetry has been considered in all ages, even by the most accomplished minds, as the fittest agent for preserving the memory of past events, and I am fully disposed to concur with him in this view. "Poetry," says this judicious writer, "is an art in which every thing should please. It is not enough to exhibit nature, which in certain places and circumstances is rude and repulsive, but the poet must choose in her what is beautiful from what is not: whence he ought to select for the subject of imitation something naturally affecting. There is a particular rhetorick for poetry, which consists in discerning very precisely what ought to be said figuratively, and what to be spoken

simply ; and in knowing where ornament is required and where not : yet the style should be copious, and every species of writing in this art should have a diction proper to itself."

We shall see by-and-by how far these observations will be borne out by the poetry of the Pentateuch, in which those conditions of the art, so judiciously stated by Du Bos, are strictly and beautifully fulfilled. Why so artificial a form of composition was adopted by the prophets, the earlier as well as the later, such as Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Balaam, Moses himself, and the prophetess Deborah, has been already sufficiently answered in the observations which I have sought to press upon the reader's attention. It was but natural that the loftiest forms of speech, the most glowing colouring of language, should be preferred to express the divine communications, and those are more especially the province of poetry. Its being the fittest agent, as Du Bos contends, for preserving the memory of past events, an observation confirmed by the opinion of the great Michaelis, formerly professor in the university of Gottingen, is a very weighty reason, among others, why it was employed so largely by the early Hebrew writers. But besides this, it was far better adapted to the character of those deep cryptic revelations which were not intended to be fully proclaimed, but of the eventual consummation of which the particulars were rather suggested than declared. The high figurative forms of speech, which poetry not only sanctioned, but which constituted its great elementary property, were

therefore better calculated to represent objects brought dimly before the mental perceptions, at which the eye of reason "looked through a glass darkly," than those terms of ordinary language which must either at once have rendered the thing definitively clear, or have confounded it altogether. In addition to all this, the mind, when labouring under the elevating excitement of inspiration, would unconsciously clothe those divine communications with which it was then teeming, in the sublimest diction; and this has always been considered by the greatest geniuses of all countries, an especial attribute of poetry.

CHAPTER III.

Poetry originally employed to commemorate great events. Its effects upon the mind and heart. Its peculiar adaptation to sacred subjects. The existence of Hebrew metre. The acrostic poetry of the Hebrews. Its purpose. The Masorites throw no light upon the question of Hebrew prosody. The marked distinction between the prose and poetry of the Bible.

IN all ages, and among all nations of the world, in which the feeblest ray of civilization has shone, poetry has been employed, not only to perpetuate great events and heroic deeds, but likewise those dispensations, in which the direct power of providence has been displayed. It supplies, moreover, the language of all picturesque sentiment, of all intense and exalted feeling, of all deep and fervid emotion. It is the essence of all that is refined and elevated both in thought and expression. It raises the soul out of the grossest elements of mere material enjoyment, into a new sphere of existence, where it seems to have a foretaste of that spiritual bliss akin to its own nature. Thus, poetry being especially calculated to carry to the mind vivid impressions of things, which would obtain only an evanescent influence there by the aid of more simple prose, the former is often resorted to, in scripture more particu-

larly, to express every thing connected with the agency and attributes of the Deity, which can only be feebly represented by the common forms of speech. It is more than probable that without some subsidiary impulse, our reason would soon subside into inactivity, and its forces stagnate from non-excitement. The imagination must be kept alive, or the mind would run great hazard of lapsing into somnolency. Once exclude it from the resources of poetry, and from the influence of those prismatic hues which the fancy displays so brightly before it, and you banish it to a worse than Siberian exile. Reason, without her retinue of intellectual graces, though she might be in the main a true, would never be the same delightful guide which we now find her. She is not only beautified, but vastly enhanced, by those extraneous attributes with which the bright creations of mind have invested her. Her own light would be extremely feeble if none other were communicated—

Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
 To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,
 Is reason to the soul : and as on high
 Those rolling fires discover but the sky,
 Nor light us here ; so reason's glimmering ray
 Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
 But guide us upwards to a better day. }

“ We shall think of poetry,” observes the eloquent Lowth, “ much more humbly than it deserves, unless we direct our attention to that quarter, where its importance is most eminently conspicuous,—unless we contemplate it as em-

ployed on sacred subjects, and in subservience to religion. This, indeed, appears to have been the original office and destination of poetry, and this it still so happily performs, that in all other cases it seems out of character, as if intended for this purpose alone. In other instances, poetry appears to want the assistance of art, but in this, to shine forth with all its natural splendor, or rather to be animated by that inspiration which, on other occasions, is spoken of without being felt. These observations are remarkably exemplified in the Hebrew poetry, than which the human mind can conceive nothing more elevated, more beautiful, or more elegant; in which the almost ineffable sublimity of the subject is fully equalled by the energy of the language and the dignity of the style. And it is worthy of observation, that as some of these writings exceed in antiquity the fabulous ages of Greece, in sublimity they are superior to the most finished productions of that polished people. Thus if the actual origin of poetry be inquired after, it must of necessity be referred to religion; and since it appears to be an art derived from nature alone, peculiar to no age or nation, and only at an advanced period of society conformed to rule and method, it must be wholly attributed to the more violent affections of the heart, the nature of which is to express themselves in an animated and lofty tone, with a vehemence of expression far remote from vulgar use.”*

* See Bishop Lowth's First Pærelection.

Although many attempts have been made, without success, to restore the Hebrew metre, which is denied by some learned men to exist in the sacred scriptures, there can be little doubt that the writers of those scriptures possessed a prosody, and were well acquainted with the canons of versification. The peculiar artifices which they employed to impart beauty, and add force to their compositions, were so consonant to the laws of verse, that we cannot disassociate them, without immediately destroying the symmetry of the passages in which they are found. The acrostic, or alphabetical form, of some of the Psalms, and of the chapters of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, except the last, show, beyond a doubt, that the Hebrew poets possessed a system of versification. These poems, among which I may mention the twenty-fifth, the thirty-fourth, the hundred and eleventh, the hundred and twelfth, the hundred and nineteenth, and the hundred and forty-fifth Psalms, clearly, to my apprehension, establish the fact, that the Hebrews were acquainted with the laws of metre. This, I think, will be admitted, if we consider the peculiarly artificial form of these poems, and of some others less perfectly acrostic, but nevertheless of the same character, in which only every stanza is distinguished by its initial letter; whereas, in the first two psalms above named, every line is so distinguished. The structure of the alphabetical poems is as follows. They consist of the same number of periods as the Hebrew alphabet, namely, twenty-two, every period forming a

short stanza, the sense being completed in each period. Every line of the stanza commences with its initial letter, each consecutive stanza following the order of the Hebrew alphabet; and although, as Michaelis truly remarks, these poems, generally, are very much beneath the sublimity of the great mass of Hebrew poetry, they nevertheless, more than any portion of it, serve to indicate the existence of Hebrew verse.

“The acrostic, or alphabetical poetry of the Hebrews,”* according to the learned authority already so often quoted, “was certainly intended to assist the memory, and was confined altogether to those compositions which consisted of detached maxims, or sentiments, without any express order of connection. The same custom is said to have been prevalent, indeed is said still to prevail in some degree, among the Syrians, the Persians, and the Arabs.” In another place he says,† “There existed a certain kind of poetry among the Hebrews, principally intended, as it should seem, for the assistance of the memory; in which, when there was little connection between the sentiments, a sort of order, or method, was preserved, by the initial letter of each line, or stanza, following the order of the alphabet. Of this there are several examples extant among the sacred poems, besides the Psalms already mentioned (the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs, from the tenth verse to the end, and the whole of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, except the last chapter,) and in these

* See Lowth's Twenty-second Prælection. † Third Prælection.

examples, the verses are so exactly marked and defined, that it is impossible to mistake them for prose; and particularly if we attentively consider the verses, and compare them with one another, since they are, in general, so regularly accommodated, that word answers to word, and almost syllable to syllable."

The Masorites, or Masoretic doctors—these I may as well at once state were a fraternity of Jewish rabbins, said to have belonged to a celebrated school at Tiberias, who were compilers of a work on the Old Testament, called the Massora, to secure the Hebrew scriptures from any changes or interpolations—these Masorites, whose pointings and readings of the sacred text the Jews hold to be oracular, throw no light upon the difficult subject of Hebrew metre; nevertheless, it cannot escape the most obtuse scrutiny, that certain portions of the divine records are as much opposed to common prose, as is the *Paradise Lost* to the written definitions of problems in Simpson's *Euclid*. Will any one deny that there is as clear a distinction in style between *Solomon's Song* and the first chapters of *Genesis*, if we may venture to compare sacred with profane compositions, as between the odes of *Anacreon* and any of the chapters in *Hume's History of England*? Our ignorance of Hebrew metre cannot blind us to the fact of the actual existence of Hebrew poetry—of poetry subject to certain given laws, by which the poetry of every civilised country is governed. Bishop Hare, indeed, imagined that he had penetrated

this inscrutable secret, but Lowth, although a strong advocate in favour of the metrical compositions of the Hebrews, completely overthrew the specious yet untenable system of Hare, and the secret therefore remains involved in its original obscurity. The true pronunciation of Hebrew being lost, cannot now be restored by any rules of orthoepy with which we are acquainted, and by which the quantities of words in all other languages are defined and regulated. It is consequently impossible to fix, with any approach to certainty, the quantities of Hebrew terms, of which the Masorites were evidently just as ignorant as modern Hebrew scholars. Notwithstanding, however, the insuperable obstacles to the final adjustment of so perplexed a question, the poetry of the Bible is as clearly distinct from, and as much elevated above, the prose of that inspired volume, as the poetry of Homer is above the prose of Xenophon, one of the most eloquent writers among the ancient Greeks, of whom it was said by Quintilian, an illustrious Roman critic and rhetorician, that the Graces dictated his language, and the Goddess of Persuasion dwelt upon his lips.

Although we have doubtless lost the true pronunciation of the Greek and Latin languages, in both the rhythm and quantity remain, so that there is no difficulty in distinguishing the versification of either; we are therefore as perfect masters of the prosody of the Greeks and Romans as were the most eminent of their own philologists; "but the state of the Hebrew," as Lowth observes, "is far more unfavourable, which,

destitute of vowel sounds, has remained altogether silent, and if I may use the expression, incapable of utterance, upwards of two thousand years. Thus not so much as the number of syllables of which each word consisted, could with any certainty be defined, much less the length and quantity of the syllables: and since the regulation of the metre of any language must depend upon two particulars, I mean the number and length of the syllables, the knowledge of which is utterly unattainable in the Hebrew, he who attempts to restore the true and genuine Hebrew versification, erects an edifice without a foundation."

CHAPTER IV.

Bishop Jebb's opinion concerning the existence of Hebrew metre. Authorities for and against it. Bishop Jebb's arguments not conclusive. Metre essential to poetry. Presumptive evidence of its existence in the Hebrew scriptures. The failure to restore it no proof that it did not exist in them. Conclusion of the argument.

As Bishop Jebb has, in his "Sacred Literature," endeavoured to prove, with considerable eloquence and felicity of argument, uniting great candour with much acuteness of critical investigation, that the Hebrew writers, both anterior and subsequent to the time of Moses, were not acquainted with the laws of metre, I shall make no apology for devoting a chapter to this difficult, but, nevertheless, interesting question.

The authorities, both ancient and modern, in favour of the original employment of a form of Hebrew versification, are not only numerous, but number among them some of the greatest names by which biblical literature has been distinguished; and although it does happen that none of the learned men who have investigated this perplexed subject, have succeeded in establishing the existence of Hebrew prosody, still their belief in its existence is a sufficient guarantee for the faith of inferior minds upon the pre-

sumed fact, even were they without reasonable arguments to confirm it, which in truth they are not. That this widely mooted question cannot be reduced to plain and palpable demonstration, is no proof against its validity, however it may render the presumptive evidence in its favour unsatisfactory; for if we should credit nothing but what rests upon such substantive proof as at once sets at defiance all doubt or denial, we shall be reduced to a very limited sphere of belief. The presumptive evidence of a fact may be so strong as to produce conviction as direct and permanent as the most positive testimony, nor will our credulity be the less implicit because it has not been fortified by demonstrative evidence.

Among the ancients who have maintained the affirmative of the question now to be considered, are Josephus, Philo Judæus, who both assert that the Hebrews had recourse to metres resembling those of the classical authors of Greece. At a later period, we have Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and Isidore, who unite in the same views, under some trifling limitations. Among the moderns, we have Vatablus, Masius, Reatinus, Croius, Fabricius, Peträus, and Ebertus, who have attempted to investigate or to restore the Hebrew versification.* Gomar's work on this subject, entitled "*Lyra Davidis: seu Nova Hebrææ S. Scripturæ ars poetica, canonibus suis descripta, et exemplis sacris, et Pindari ac Sophoclis parallelis demonstrata,*"

* See Jebb's *Sacred Literature*, p. 10.

was approved by the celebrated Buxtorf, Heinsius, De Dieu, and others. Marcus Meibomius, Van der Hardt, and Bishop Hare, have each imagined that they had restored the primitive metres, but although their several systems, unquestionably ingenious and plausible, were supported by numerous adherents, they have undoubtedly failed in their praiseworthy attempts. Their failure is nevertheless no demonstration against the existence of that which they have failed to establish. If Newton had not discovered the law of gravitation, it would still have governed the world of matter, though mankind had been ever so ignorant of its influence upon that mysterious element.

Against the numerous authorities which maintain the presence of metre in Holy Writ, it must be admitted that many eminent scholars and divines of equal reputation might be named who have taken the opposite view in this difficult inquiry; still, as the greatest, or at least the most active and scrutinizing among modern Hebrew scholars, namely, Bishop Lowth, has maintained the affirmative of this question with that discrimination and eloquence for which he was so distinguished,—the sanction of so eminent a name gives me more confidence in resisting the views of the amiable and classical Bishop Jebb, notwithstanding the respectable authorities behind which he trenches himself.

“The grand characteristic of Hebrew poetry,” says this elegant and accomplished writer,*

* Sacred Literature, pp. 3, 4.

“ does not appear to belong peculiarly to the language of the OLD Testament, as contradistinguished from that of the NEW. It is not the acrostical or regularly alphabetical commencement of lines or stanzas; for this occurs but in twelve poems of the Old Testament: it is not the introduction of foreign words, and of, what grammarians call, the paragogic or redundant particles; for these licences, though frequent, are by no means universal in the poetical books of scripture; and they are occasionally admitted into passages merely historical and prosaic: it is not the rhyming termination of lines, for no traces of this artifice are discoverable in the alphabetical poems, the lines or stanzas of which are defined with infallible precision, and every attempt to force it on the text has been accompanied by the most licentious mutilation of scripture: and finally, this grand characteristic is not the adoption of metre, properly so called, and analogous to the metre of the heathen classics; for the efforts of the learned to discover such metre in any one poem of the Hebrews, have universally failed; and while we are morally certain, that, even though it were known and employed by the Jews, while their language was a living one, it is quite beyond recovery in the dead and unpronounceable state of that language, there are also strong reasons for believing that even in the most flourishing state of their literature, the Hebrew poets never used this decoration.”

Now let us examine carefully the force of these objections, and see to what they amount.

“The grand characteristic of Hebrew poetry does not appear to belong peculiarly to the original language of the Old Testament, as contradistinguished from that of the New.” To this it may be replied, it is not necessary that the grand characteristic of Hebrew poetry should belong *peculiarly* to the original language of the Old Testament as contradistinguished from the New; if it belong to it *generally*, that is, in those portions assumed to be poetical, it is sufficient for the argument in favour of the positive existence of poetry in those portions, which must presuppose the existence of metre, the vehicle by which poetry has been communicated in all languages, both ancient and modern. I contend that poetry, properly so called, cannot be disassociated from metre, that being the elementary law by which it is governed and distinguished, and without which, in fact, it cannot exist; for it is no longer poetry than while it is indebted for its organization to those laws, which for upwards of two thousand years have directed its production, and apart from which its real presence becomes a mere undemonstrable problem.—Else, why should the great masters of antiquity have fettered themselves with the stubborn, and often untractable trammels of metre, if they did not think them absolutely essential to poetry—nay, inseparable from its very character and existence? If the same results could be secured by an easier mode of production, why did the great geniuses of ancient Greece adopt the more difficult, when they gained nothing by such an additional

expencc of time and labour? The truth is, that poetry and prose have nothing in common but the employment of the parts of speech. The former is the result of a distinct and separate art with which the other has no conceivable sympathy or relationship, and disassociated from this art, to which it owes its constitution, it is no longer poetry. Elevated sentiments, sublime thoughts, gorgeous figures, lively images, and choice selections of phrase, will not alone constitute poetry; these are, doubtless, the elements out of which it is formed, but those elements are subjected to the operation of certain rules, before they can be realized into that specific identity which brings them out of the process of formation into the peculiarity of frame and contexture, which we designate poetry. It is the manner in which these elements are combined, harmonized, and amalgamated in the structure, which will substantiate their claim to this distinction. As a proof of this, let us take the first few lines of Satan's address to the sun, from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and cast them into prose, and we shall immediately see, that all their poetic beauty is at once banished;—for example,

O thou, that with surpassing glory crowned
 Look'st from thy sole dominion like the God
 Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
 Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call,
 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,
 O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams,
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell; how glorious once!—above thy sphere;
 Till pride and, worse—ambition, threw me down,
 Warring in heaven 'gainst heaven's matchless king.

Now let us divest this fine passage of its rhythm and metre, and we shall see what it will become.—‘O thou, that crowned with surpassing glory, lookest, like the God of this new world, from thy sole dominion; at the sight of whom all the stars hide their diminished heads;—I call upon thee, but not with a friendly voice, for the purpose of telling thee how I hate thy beams, which recal to my recollection from what state I fell; how glorious once!—above thy sphere; until pride, and what is worse, ambition, threw me down, whilst I was warring in heaven against the matchless king of heaven.’ Will it not be obvious to any discerning person, that the passage owes its *poetical* beauty to the metrical structure of the lines, the happy collocation of the phrases, disposed in exact conformity to the laws of versification, the harmony of the metrical cadences, the exquisite flow of the rhythm—in short, to those very artifices out of which poetry rises, and which are utterly oppugnant to prose? The elements of poetry in the abstract, unless properly assimilated and applied, will be found a mere homogeneous mass, without order or beauty, as a whole; they must be subjected to those laws which bring them under the necessary rules of proportion and arrangement; they must exhibit all those specific features—those indispensable concomitants of poetry—cadence, rhythm, correspondency of syllabic arrangement, artificial adjustment of pauses, nice regulation of emphasis, else, although they may be fine in the individual detail, they will be very

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses, which are arranged in a columnar fashion. The names are written in a cursive script, and the addresses are written in a more formal, printed style. The list appears to be a directory or a roster of some kind.

2. The second part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These are arranged in a columnar fashion, similar to the first part. The notes are written in a cursive script, and they appear to be a continuation of the information in the first part.

3. The third part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These are arranged in a columnar fashion, similar to the first part. The notes are written in a cursive script, and they appear to be a continuation of the information in the first part.

4. The fourth part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These are arranged in a columnar fashion, similar to the first part. The notes are written in a cursive script, and they appear to be a continuation of the information in the first part.

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8. The eighth part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These are arranged in a columnar fashion, similar to the first part. The notes are written in a cursive script, and they appear to be a continuation of the information in the first part.

9. The ninth part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These are arranged in a columnar fashion, similar to the first part. The notes are written in a cursive script, and they appear to be a continuation of the information in the first part.

10. The tenth part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These are arranged in a columnar fashion, similar to the first part. The notes are written in a cursive script, and they appear to be a continuation of the information in the first part.

Art is a law by which nature herself must be regulated; it is essential to the development of her beauty—but for her the earth would be a wilderness, and mankind a community of savages. Beauty can only be methodised and perfected by the union of nature and art—they are ancillary agents. Poetry, like architecture, is the highest development of the letter—it is the grand result of the most artificial combinations, of which metre is the resolving and directing medium. This will extend from the sublimest order of poetry to the most simple, for simplicity is not an abandonment of art, but only a modification of its resources—the mere reducing it to the most delicate proportions. The simplest ballad is as artificial, relatively to its length, as the most complex epic, because both are governed by the same elementary laws, and those are the laws of metre.

I confess I do not see that the argument for the presence of metre in the poetical portions of the Old Testament, is at all invalidated by the fact, that some of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry may be detected in the prose of the New, which Bishop Jebb has most satisfactorily shown to be the case. For it is certain that the Jews of our Saviour's time, whether Hebrews or Hellenists, were generally little better acquainted with the original language of the Bible than modern Hebrew scholars, as is sufficiently evident from the quotations being made by the apostles and evangelists from the Greek version of that inspired book;

we may therefore fairly suppose, that being unacquainted with Hebrew versification, but tracing certain distinguishing marks of structure, they imitated in prose what in the original might really have existed in verse. For, let any one read the examples of parallelism, an artifice peculiar to the sacred writers, quoted by Bishop Jebb from the evangelical and apostolical scriptures, and compare them with similar examples from the Hebrew, and he will at once perceive that while the latter ascend to the highest poetical sublimity, the former are not elevated above the ordinary level of elegant prose. The difference is so remarkable as to give additional confirmation to my mind of the presence of metrical poetry in the Bible.

Although every form of parallelism may perhaps be discovered in the New Testament, yet it is for the most part much less definite and distinct than in the Old, and in many of Bishop Jebb's examples is so faintly traced as scarcely to be detected; but this is certain, that in the Hebrew writings the parallelisms are, in almost all instances, broadly obvious, and always greatly enhance the beauty of the passages they are employed to adorn; while, in the Greek sacred scriptures, they frequently, nay, most commonly, do not: to my apprehension, as Bishop Jebb exhibits them, they often encumber and perplex the sense. When this learned and amiable prelate would divert the clear, nervous simplicity, and energetic brevity of the Sermon on the Mount, from its plain but essentially prosaic form, into an ex-

ample of sententious and poetical parallelism, he at once subtracts from its characteristic artlessness and truth, without adding to its beauty, and shows to a demonstration that those high poetical attributes so remarkable in the Hebrew scriptures, which are eminently distinguished by the characteristics of poetry, do not really belong to this piece of exquisitely beautiful, indeed, but nevertheless unpretending prose. I do not hesitate to contend, that the elements of poetry are not traceable in it. Of this, any person of common taste will be convinced, who reads it, and then turns to the sublime chapters of the incomparable book of Job. I confess, that Bishop Jebb's volume, instead of shaking my conviction as to the existence of Hebrew metre, has, on the contrary, greatly strengthened it.

In addition to what has been said, there is another strong fact, that to the student of Hebrew the manifestly prosaic portions are clearly intelligible, but the moment he enters on the poetical portions, he is at once perplexed by the change of phraseology, abrupt transitions, violent inversions of language, elliptical forms of expression, unusual accommodation of the parts of speech, and other modes of embellishment peculiar to those artifices of composition subjected to the laws of metre, which are, moreover, the universal characteristics of metrical distribution, and are in every language far more difficult to be comprehended by an alien than ordinary prose. Most of those portions of the New Testament, however, in which Bishop Jebb discovers a conformity with the poetical

parts of the Old, are not one jot more difficult of interpretation to the student than the simplest passages, except in instances where the thought is not fully evolved, and the argument is of an abstract character, as frequently in St. Paul's epistles, and sometimes from the condensed style of that writer, which is often severely brief and extremely abrupt, and this in those passages obstinately and indisputably prosaic.

It is evident that a peculiar phraseology is indispensable to metre, as language must be accommodated to it; it does not accommodate itself to language. Thus, consequently, it is, that all metrical composition is far more difficult to understand in a foreign language, than writings in which the ordinary forms of phraseology only are employed. The Italian student will read the works of Machiavelli with ease, when he could with difficulty translate a couplet of Dante. So in French, a few lessons make us acquainted with the *Telemaque* of Fenelon, when only our most mature studies can enable us to become masters of Corneille. Let any one read the two first chapters of the book of Job, and then proceed to the third chapter of the same book, will he not be sensible of the immediate transition from prose to poetry? Will he not discover a different phraseology? Will he not perceive the language to be in the highest degree figurative, and the sentiments eminently sublime? Will he not distinguish a certain artifice of structure, and a uniform adherence to rules of art, not traceable throughout the Hebrew writings? Will he not detect

a rhythmical harmony in the sentences, and an artful collocation of the words, as different from the two first chapters, as the historical books of Herodotus are from the lofty epics of Homer? He will perpetually discover the employment of artifices, exquisite artifices indeed, but utterly inconsistent with the plainer and more rigidly consecutive order of prose.

Can *all* this be said with like truth of any portion of the New Testament? Is there the same marked difference as between certain parts of the one, between any parts of the other? In some instances indeed, there may be detected, greater elevation of style, as in the concluding chapter of the general epistle of St. James, occasional examples of parallelism, and traces of epanodistic construction, but these instances are comparatively rare, often, as I believe, purely accidental, and sometimes merely imitative and scarcely in a single example do the passages exhibiting them present that decided contrast of structure so strikingly observable in the Old Testament, betwixt the prosaic and poetical portions. Bishop Jebb has employed all his ingenuity and elegant scholarship so to dispose the clauses of his translations, as to render them subservient to the illustration of his hypothesis, but with all his accomplished capacity, and plausible artifice of arrangement, he often fails to work out the elements of his theory. His postulates are always ingenious, sometimes just, eloquently put, and logically proposed; nevertheless, in my apprehension, conviction is not the result

of perusing his volume; he fails to satisfy, though he occasionally produces arguments not easily refuted—still, I say again, he fails to enforce conviction.

The next objection of the author of “Sacred Literature,” that the grand characteristic of Hebrew poetry “is not the acrostical or regularly alphabetical commencement of lines, or *stanzas*, as they occur but in twelve poems in the Old Testament,” appears to me an argument against his own theory; for he seems virtually to admit the metrical arrangement in these twelve poems, since he talks of *stanzas*, and how are stanzas to be disassociated from metre to which they essentially belong? they constitute one of the immediate and primary results of this artifice, and where they can be discovered to exist, metre must of necessity exist also. If these stanzas can be traced in the alphabetical poems, this is at once conclusive of the presence of metre in the poetry of the Hebrew scriptures; and surely if this can be found to exist in twelve instances, in the absence of all knowledge of Hebrew prosody, it may reasonably be assumed to exist in more. The eloquent author of “Sacred Literature” does not grapple with the difficulty which the acrostic poems present against his theory, of the non-existence of Hebrew metre, he therefore dismisses the subject with unusual brevity.

Bishop Jebb’s next objection appears to me to have little force.

“The grand characteristic of Hebrew poc-

try," he observes, "is not the introduction of foreign words, and of what grammarians call the paragogic or redundant particles; for these licences, though frequent, are by no means universal in the poetical books of scripture, and they are occasionally admitted in passages merely historical and prosaic." As I write principally for unlearned readers, I shall offer no apology for explaining that the paragoge is a figure by which a letter or syllable is added to a word without making the slightest alteration in its sense, as *med* for *me*, *dicier* for *dici*; it was no doubt originally invented exclusively for metrical purposes, though it is occasionally found in prose writings, but much less frequently than in poetical. In answer to Bishop Jebb's objection, with reference to the paragogic or redundant particles, I cannot do better than quote the words of an anonymous writer in the *Critica Biblica* (vol. i. page 86), "That these particles are not the grand characteristic of Hebrew poetry we readily allow; nor did Bishop Lowth adduce them as such, but merely as a proof of its metrical composition, and their validity as such is not at all affected by their occurrence being by no means universal in the poetical books of scripture: for most assuredly they would only be used when required by the measure." The same writer again says, "but Dr. Jebb, in a note to the passage we have cited, further affirms, 'it is remarkable that in the preliminary dissertation to Isaiah, no mention is made of these particles; whence may safely be inferred, how little stress the

Bishop was disposed to lay on them, as characteristics of Hebrew poetry; for in that dissertation, he gave his last, his fullest, and most mature views of the subject.' How Dr. Jebb could have overlooked the following paragraph in the above-mentioned dissertation, we cannot conceive! 'But beside the poetical structure of the sentences, there are other indications of verse in the poetical and prophetical parts of the Hebrew scriptures; such are peculiarities of language, unusual and foreign words, phrases and forms of words uncommon in prose, bold elliptical expressions, frequent and abrupt changes of persons, and a use of tenses out of the common order; and lastly the poetical dialect, consisting chiefly of certain anomalies peculiar to poetry, *in letters and syllables added to the end of words*, a kind of licence commonly permitted to poetry in every language. But as these cannot be explained by a few examples, nor perfectly understood without some knowledge of Hebrew, I must beg leave to refer the learned reader, who would inquire further into this subject, to what I have said upon it in another place (*De Sacra Poesi Hebræorum*, Prælec. 3, 14, 15), or rather to recommend it to his own observation, in reading the sacred poets in their own language.' (Prelim. Dissert. p. 67.) Here we have the most unequivocal testimony of Bishop Lowth, respecting the importance and utility of these particles, in his last, his fullest, and his most mature views of the subject."

Bishop Jebb's objection, with reference to the rhyming termination of lines, scarcely de-

mands an observation; for though Le Clerc espoused the scheme of rhyming poetry, "the most untenable and absurd," says Lowth, "of any proposed," it has been so little insisted on as to require no serious refutation.

"Finally," says the author of *Sacred Literature*, "the grand characteristic of Hebrew poetry is not the adoption of metre, properly so called, and analogous to the metre of the heathen classics; for the efforts of the learned to discover such metre, in any one poem of the Hebrews, have universally failed." But in reply it may be observed, that this is no evidence against the positive existence of Hebrew metre. The difficulty of making out the quantities of syllables in a dead language, which has been but imperfectly understood for upwards of two thousand years, the true pronunciation of which has been entirely lost, and therefore of which it is impossible to fix either the accent or quantity, both the number of syllables in a word and likewise their length being a question of inextricable perplexity, we can be at no loss to conceive why the learned have universally failed to restore the lost canons of Hebrew versification. This however is no proof that they were never employed, especially in the face of such strong presumptive evidence as has been accumulated in favour of their original existence; of these a few shall here be produced.

There is first then the marked difference in style and structure in such portions of those writings, confessedly by the same author, as are decidedly prosaic when compared with those,

by the same hand, which are presumed to be poetical. In the one case the simplest form of expression being employed, in the other the most complicated, figurative, and artificial. Secondly, there are the acrostic poems, modelled after a certain form, and evidently subjected to certain laws, which lift them quite out of the order of prose composition, and confine them to the most rigid resources of art, the lines in each being so "regularly accommodated, that word answers to word and syllable to syllable." Thirdly, we find in the writings of the Hebrew poets words used in a sense and manner remote from their common acceptance. Sometimes they are shortened by elisions, at other times lengthened by the addition of a whole syllable—that is, by the application of what I have before explained as the paragogic or redundant particles; expedients almost exclusively peculiar to metrical composition. We see the various licences resorted to employed by the poets of ancient Greece and Rome; these are traceable even in the works of the most primitive among the oriental writers of verse, and some of the Hindoo poetical writings are no doubt coeval with, if they were not anterior to the Pentateuch. We discover those obvious anomalies of verbal structure and those involutions of expression peculiar to the poetical dialect of every country. We observe letters added to or cut off from the end of words, which manifest a decided submission to the rhythm, number, and measure of syllables. We know also that much of the Hebrew poetry

was composed purposely to be sung; as was no doubt the Thanksgiving ode, produced by Moses, immediately after the Israelites had passed the Red Sea; the chorus, "O sing ye to Jehovah," chanted by Miriam and the women, sufficiently attesting this fact.

It is the opinion of Dr. Geddes, in which he is followed by other learned authorities, that on the day of celebration after the signal deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, when this ode was sung, the men repeated every stanza after Moses, much in the same manner as the first part of our Litany is repeated by the clerk and congregation, and the women after Miriam.

"Thus far, therefore," says Bishop Lowth, in his third prælection, "I think we may with safety affirm, that the Hebrew poetry is metrical. One or two of the peculiarities also of their versification it may be proper to remark, which, as they are very observable in those poems in which the verses are defined by the initial letters, may at least be reasonably conjectured of the rest. The first of these is, that the verses are very unequal in length—the shortest consisting of six or seven syllables, the longest extending to about twice that number; the same poem is, however, generally continued throughout in verses not very unequal to each other. I must also observe, that the close of the verse generally falls where the members of the sentences are divided." This mode of versification, as Mr. Henley truly observes, is not altogether foreign to our own

language, as is evident from some of our earliest writers, particularly *Piers Plowman*.

“ But, although nothing certain can be defined,” observes Lowth again, in the same prælection above quoted, “ concerning the metre of the particular verses, there is yet another artifice of poetry to be remarked of them, when in a collective state, when several of them are taken together. In the Hebrew poetry, as I before remarked, there may be observed a certain conformation of the sentences, the nature of which is that a complete sense is almost equally infused into every component part, and that every member constitutes an entire verse: so that, as the poems divide themselves in a manner spontaneously into periods, for the most part equal; so the periods themselves are divided into verses, most commonly couplets, though frequently of greater length. This is chiefly observable in those passages which frequently occur in the Hebrew poetry, in which they treat one subject in many different ways, and dwell upon the same sentiment; when they express the same thing in different words, or different things in a similar form of words; when equals refer to equals, and opposites to opposites: and since this artifice of composition seldom fails to produce, even in prose, an agreeable and measured cadence, we can scarcely doubt that it must have imparted to their poetry, were we masters of the versification, an exquisite degree of beauty and grace.”

From the sixteenth to the twenty-first page

of Bishop Jebb's Sacred Literature, there is an attempted confutation of Lowth's arguments in favour of the existence of Hebrew metre, but I think it utterly fails of its purpose. In stating Lowth's admissions against his own views, which by the latter are most candidly made, Bishop Jebb overlooks, or at least withholds, the strong points of the case, which appear to me most satisfactorily to establish the fact which he attempts, as I think, unsuccessfully, to disprove. He admits the existence of Hebrew poetry, first, "because that very 'scale of division,' and that 'studious, elaborate, artificial, and exact contrivance and execution,' to which Bishop Lowth refers, and which on all hands are admitted, are in themselves sufficient to take the composition out of the sphere of prose, and place it in the sphere of poetry: and, secondly, because the rejection of poetical numbers, properly so called, by no means implies the assertion, that 'harmony is totally disregarded.' " With this admission, why should there be any thing incongruous in assuming the existence of Hebrew metre, in the absence of all proof to the contrary, when the highest attributes of poetry are universally admitted to exist in the sacred writings of the Old Testament; when moreover it is an undisputed fact that metre has been the vehicle of poetry in every civilized country, possessing an established literature, so far back as we can trace the existence of composition? Prose-poetry, so called, that is, prose containing the *materials* of poetry, may, undoubtedly,

exist, but it has never attained to the grandeur of metrical, and this because it is not obedient to those laws which render it essentially poetry; for who would compare the wild and capricious modulations of Ossianic prose to the exquisitely melodious rhythm of *Paradise Lost*? Who would compare the bold, but exaggerated figures—the agreeable, but often metreticous, extravagancies of the son of Fingal, to the sublime descriptions and lofty inspirations of our great epic poet?

I shall confirm my argument with a very sensible quotation from an anonymous writer.* “We regret being compelled to differ from the author of ‘Sacred Literature,’ but it is essential to our present subject that we express our dissent. Dr. Jebb, in the above-cited volume, institutes an analogical argument against the metre of Hebrew poetry, drawn from the non-observance of a redundancy of means in the works and word of God. But, were the premises well-founded with regard to the word of God (which we are by no means disposed to admit), the argument proves too much. For, if parallelism abundantly distinguished it from prose, it must be admitted that the alphabetical arrangement, for instance, is redundant; and thus we are constrained either to reject one of them, or acknowledge a redundancy of means.

“The next argument of Dr. Jebb, is brought from the transfusibility of the Hebrew poetry into other languages; and he contends that, if

* See *Critica Biblica*, vol. i. pp. 82, 83..

it were metrical, this could not be the case. But, its transfusibility, depending upon the preservation of the order of the words, may, we imagine, more properly be considered as a proof of the contrary; for, could the order of the words be preserved in translations from the poetry of other languages, the same effect would be produced; but it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive that this would be the case unless the composition were metrical. And here we would observe, that the idiom and the inflection of nouns and verbs, of the Hebrew language, are so extremely simple, that an inverted order of the words, to any great extent, was not necessary for the purposes of poetry, though that it does exist is well known, and is a proof of its being metrical.

“But Dr. Jebb infers from some expressions of Bishop Lowth, which he adduces, that they are ‘admissions, which put fairly together, amount to a virtual surrender of the point that he labours to maintain!’ We will, therefore, proceed to an examination of these expressions. Dr. Jebb observes—‘He (Bishop Lowth) begins, by asserting, that certain of the Hebrew writings are not only animated with the true poetic spirit, but are, in some degree, couched in poetic numbers; yet he allows, that the quantity, the rhythm, or modulation of Hebrew poetry, not only is unknown, but admits of no investigation by human art or industry.’ Here we cannot perceive the least incongruity: for metrical composition may certainly exist (and Bishop Lowth, in our opinion,

has amply shown that it does exist,) and we be ignorant of the mode of scanning it, owing to the true pronunciation being lost. Dr. Jebb proceeds. 'He states, after Abarbanel, that the Jews themselves disclaim the very memory of metrical composition.' Here Bishop Lowth is speaking with reference to a knowledge of a *system* of ancient metre, which is, in fact, a repetition of the preceding expression. For his words are,—'The Jews, by their own confession, are no longer, nor have been indeed for many ages, *masters of the system* of ancient metre. All remembrance of it has ceased from those times in which the Hebrew became a dead language!' And the language of Abarbanel is as follows:—'It cannot be doubted that the Canticles of the second species (those adapted to music) were possessed of a certain melody or metre, which, through the length of the Captivity, is become obsolete.' (Lowth, Lect. xviii. p. 6.) 'He acknowledges,' says Dr. Jebb, 'that the artificial conformation of the sentences, is the sole apparent indication of metre in these poems.' We know not where Dr. Jebb found this acknowledgment; it is certainly not in the lecture to which he refers. For Bishop Lowth, after stating that 'the other arguments, however, ought to be particularly adverted to upon this subject; the poetical dialect for instance, the diction so totally different from the language of common life, and other similar circumstances, (see Lect. iii.) which an attentive reader will easily discover, but which cannot be explained by a few examples,' adds, 'to

those we may add the artificial conformation of the sentences, which, as it has always appeared to me a necessary *concomitant* of metrical composition, the only one which is now apparent, I shall afterwards endeavour to explain more at large.' (Lect. xviii.) The next expression which Dr. Jebb adduces, is in substance the same as the first. If our readers can perceive in these 'admissions' any virtual surrender of the point, we willingly concede to them a greater share of penetration and judgment than we possess."

After all, feeling as I do the greatest reverence for the exemplary piety, and admiration for the varied learning of the author of "Sacred Literature," a work exhibiting great erudition and critical sagacity, I nevertheless must not shrink from the acknowledgment that his volume has altogether failed to convince me of the general truth of his theory, namely, that the various parts of the New Testament are written after the model of the poetical sections of the Old, and that they exhibit in the same proportion the characteristics of Hebrew poetry; Bishop Jebb assuming, that though the language of the evangelical and apostolical scriptures is Greek, the style is Hebrew. I admit that his book is unrivalled in philological acuteness, but in my judgment it fails to convince, because it proves too much; for could I be satisfied of the truth of his positions in every particular, it would at once shake my faith in the integrity of that part of the sacred canon, which, as a christian, I have been

taught to reverence, and, I trust, have deeply revered, from the days of my childhood. The employment of such prodigious complication of art, as Bishop Jebb there exhibits, does not appear at all consentaneous with the simplicity and unlettered plainness of the characters of those men by whom the history of our Lord's life was given to the world. The uncommon dialectical skill and philological subtlety displayed, is altogether inconcomitant with the education and capacities of the humble fishermen of Galilee. The mechanical arrangement of their compositions is, according to the author of "Sacred Literature," as intricate as the most involved metaphysical sorites. Such an extraordinary involution of means would appear to me altogether beyond the grasp of their minds, which had evidently never been severely disciplined in the artifices of literary production, and quite out of the sphere of their contemplation.

Many of Bishop Jebb's examples of parallelism, even from the evangelists, are so extremely complicated, so woven into a tissue of dependent parts and corresponding members, exhibiting such remote and almost microscopic affinities;—he represents passages composed of many members, presenting such extreme complexity of artifice and such an infinitely varied knowledge of resources, as never could have been in the contemplation of men generally illiterate, as the evangelists and apostles undoubtedly were, and writing rather for the unlearned multitude than for the learned few. Such consummate skill in

the art of composition, as only the most perfect masters of language could be competent to display, agrees not with the simple and unpretending characters of those men whom the Saviour of the world selected to promulgate precepts and doctrines, which he himself couched in the plainest terms, accompanied, certainly, with a grave force of expression, befitting the dignity and importance of those divine communications. They were conveyed in language intended to be universally intelligible, not in sentences laid out and fashioned with all the perplexing subtleties of logical finesse, and constructed upon rules of art scarcely less intricate than the celebrated labyrinth of Dædalus.

St. Paul, indeed, we can readily imagine to have availed himself of the various resources of logic, as he was a man of singular accomplishments, and no doubt of various learning; nevertheless, why he should have displayed in his epistles to the churches the peculiar characteristics of Hebrew poetry, I am utterly at a loss to apprehend. Those writings of the apostle were pastoral letters, addressed to the churches which he had established, either to reprove them for their religious defalcations, or to strengthen them in the faith; with the exception of two to Timothy, one to Titus, and one to Philemon. It is scarcely conceivable that so argumentative a mind as St. Paul's would have satisfied itself with fettering his logic in the artifices adopted by the Hebrew poets; and I feel satisfied, in my own mind, that there is not a single line

of original poetry in the whole of his epistles, however Bishop Jebb may discover in them those parallelisms which especially distinguish the poetry of the Old Testament.

With reference to the Sermon on the Mount being distributed, as the author of "Sacred Literature" attempts to prove, into parallelisms, I would ask if any one can gravely suppose that our blessed Saviour intended that his divine discourse, designed as it was to be a compendium of precept and of doctrine, to be remembered throughout all future ages by the most illiterate as well as by the most learned, should exhibit contrivances so refined and subtle as to require all the philological acumen and keen sagacity of investigation of Bishop Jebb to discover? I cannot, after reading his book with the severest attention, dispossess my mind of the conviction that the parallelisms which he traces in that exquisite production, exquisite, as it appears to me, for its perfect simplicity and the utter absence of artifice which it displays, are often accidental, and more frequently brought out by Bishop Jebb availing himself of the various readings of learned critics, and inverting the phrases, in order to establish the principle of his theory; a mode by which any sententious passage containing antithetical expressions, or members strongly correspondent, might be easily cast into parallelisms by a person even of less ingenuity than the learned and pious author of "Sacred Literature." Nay, let any such passage be distributed into syllogisms, and paral-

lelisms would come out ready at his hand, as distinct as many of his examples in the New Testament.

Now the difference of these characteristics of Hebrew poetry in the Old and New Testaments, is, that while in the one they are obvious, in the other they require to be *made appear*.—In the former, though our translators were evidently often unconscious of their presence, yet in spite of this unconsciousness, they are exhibited, because in fact they were too prominent to be concealed; while in the latter, they require the utmost labour of dialectical investigation to render them apparent, and this too in a language so much better understood than, and presenting so few difficulties by comparison with, that of the Hebrew scriptures.

I feel I may be accused of presumption, in opposing the views of so elegant a scholar, so acute a critic, and so sound a theologian, as the author of “Sacred Literature;” but though I am fully conscious of my own inferiority to that great and good man in those high intellectual qualities for which he was so eminently distinguished, I may nevertheless be permitted to remind the reader, that a few rays of light condensed through a lens and thrown upon a magazine of powder, may explode the whole mass, when the diffused rays of the mighty sun—the great fountain of light and heat—might shine upon it for ages without exciting to combustion that terrible agent of ruin and of death.

CHAPTER V.

Parallelism one of the great distinguishing characteristics of Hebrew poetry. Examples of this artifice. The epanode. Bishop Jebb's rationale of it. The characteristics of Hebrew poetry manifest in the Pentateuch. Reasons for the difficulty of understanding certain parts of the Bible. How to be obviated. Prophecies of Isaac, Jacob, Balaam, and Moses.

ONE of the great distinguishing characteristics of Hebrew poetry is that peculiar conformation of the sentences, called by Bishop Lowth, parallelism, and divided by him into three kinds: synonymous parallelism, "when the same sentiment is repeated in different but almost equivalent terms;"* the antithetic parallelism, "when a thing is illustrated, by its contrary being opposed to it;"† and the synthetic, or constructive parallelism, "in which the sentences answer to each other, not by the iteration of the same image, or sentiment, or the opposition of their contraries, but merely by the form of construction."‡ I shall give one example of each kind from Bishop Lowth's *Prælections*, translated by Dr. Gregory. The first example is from Isaiah, being the first, second, and third verses of the sixtieth chapter.

* Vide *Prælection* 19. † *Ibid.* ‡ *Ibid.*

Arise, be thou enlightened ; for thy light is come,
 And the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee.
 For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
 And a thick vapour the nations :
 But upon thee shall Jehovah arise,
 And his glory upon thee shall be conspicuous.
 And the nations shall walk in thy light,
 And kings in the brightness of thy rising.

Here it will be observed, that every alternate line corresponds with the preceding ; the same sentiment being repeated in different but nearly equivalent terms. In fact, the second line of each couplet is a sort of echo to the first, the latter being exegetical of the former. This form of parallelism has been termed, by Bishop Jebb, "cognate," because the parallel terms are rather kindred than equivalent, and by a later writer, with juster discrimination, "gradation," because the sense shows an obvious gradation of force in the second line, where it advances towards a climax. Now, though in Lowth's version the parallel terms are more strongly discriminated than in our authorized translation, still, those terms will be equally conspicuous there, as will be better seen by breaking the passage into hemistichs, as Bishop Lowth has done. Our Bible translation is word for word, as follows :—

Arise, shine, for thy light is come,
 And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.
 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
 And gross darkness the people :
 But the Lord shall arise upon thee,
 And his glory shall be seen upon thee.
 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light,
 And kings to the brightness of thy rising.

The following is a specimen of antithetic parallelism from the Proverbs, chap. xxvii. 6, 7; xiii. 7; xxviii. 11.

The blows of a friend are faithful,
But the kisses of an enemy are treacherous.
The cloyed will trample upon an honey-comb,
But to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet.
There is who maketh himself rich and wanteth all things,
Who maketh himself poor, yet hath much wealth.
The rich man is wise in his own eyes,
But the poor man that hath discernment to trace him out,
will despise him.

In the four pair of lines now quoted, it will be at once perceived that every alternate line is an antithesis to the one preceding; or in other words, it presents a complete opposition of words and thoughts. This form of opposing sentiments and expressions in direct contrast imparts great force and distinctness to both; every proposition, sentiment or expression so contrasted giving an emphasis to its opposite and fixing it with greater vividness upon the mind, because there is a reflex impression, as it were, conveyed; the one image, so to speak, reflecting the other, while each is heightened and rendered more lively by the opposition of its contrary; they are mutually enhanced by this process. -Our common Bible version gives the passages thus:—

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
The full soul loatheth an honey-comb:
But to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.
There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing:
There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.
The rich man is wise in his own conceit:
But the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.

It will be observed that, except in the first pair of lines, the parallels are as distinctly marked in this as in Lowth's translation, which was especially made to exhibit the parallelisms; and though the former is somewhat less graceful than the latter, it is superior in terse simplicity, and certainly does not fall below it in energy. In the first couplet there is an inversion of the phrase, which destroys its symmetry by disturbing the natural position of the antithetical terms, which Lowth has restored to their proper situation.

The synthetic, or constructive parallelism, is not so obvious as the other two, and is frequently not to be detected by a superficial examination. In the following specimen, however, from the Psalms, it cannot escape observation. (Psalm xix. 7—11.)

The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul ;
 The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple.
 The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart ;
 The commandment of Jehovah is clear, enlightening the eyes.
 The fear of Jehovah is pure, enduring for ever ;
 The judgments of Jehovah are truth, they are just altogether.
 More desirable than gold, or than much fine gold ;
 And sweeter than honey or the dropping of honey-combs.

“Constructive parallels,” says Bishop Jebb,*
 “are when the parallelism consists only in the similar form of construction; in which word does not answer to word, and sentence to sentence, as equivalent or opposite; but there is a correspondence and equality between different propositions with respect to the shape and turn

* Sacred Literature, p. 25.

of the whole sentence, and of the constituent parts; such as noun answering to noun, verb to verb, interrogative to interrogative. To this description of parallelism may be referred all such as do not come within the two former classes. The variety of this form is accordingly very great. Sometimes the parallelism is more, sometimes less exact; sometimes hardly at all apparent."

It will be seen in the last quotation, that the parallelism consists in the relative conformation of the lines in each couplet. There is no reduplication of the terms, or gradational advance of meaning, as in the first form. Though embracing different propositions, and having no necessary connection in the sense, the parallel lines maintain the closest similarity of construction. Each couplet, by way of more intelligible illustration, may be compared to a pair of rods, the one brass, the other iron; both being precisely of the same shape, but differing entirely in colour. In the extract last given, there will be observed the same conformity of structure in each pair of lines, the parallels exhibiting the closest exactitude in the form, though not in the sense, as will perhaps be more distinctly perceived by repeating part of the quotation:—

The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul ;
 The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple.
 The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart ;
 The commandment of Jehovah is clear, enlightening the eyes.

In our authorized version of the Scriptures

this passage, broken into the hemistichal form, stands literally thus:—

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul :
 The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart :
 The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever :
 The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold :
 Sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb.

It will be readily perceived that there is no essential difference betwixt this and Bishop Lowth's version.

There is a fourth form of parallelism, mentioned by Bishop Jebb, which he calls "introverted." In this "the stanzas are so constructed that whatever be the number of lines, the first line shall be parallel with the last; the second with the penultimate; and and so throughout, in an order that looks inward, or, to borrow a military phrase, from flanks to centre." Here follows a specimen:—

The idols of the heathen are silver and gold ;
 The work of men's hand ;
 They have mouths, but they speak not ;
 They have eyes, but they see not ;
 They have ears, but they hear not ;
 Neither is there any breath in their mouths ;
 They who make them are like unto them :
 So are all they who put their trust in them.
 (Psalm cxxxv. 15—18.)

"The parallelisms here marked out, will, it is presumed, be found accurate:—

"In the first line we have the idolatrous heathen ;
 In the eighth, those who put their trust in idols :

In the second line, the fabrication ;
 In the seventh, the fabricators :
 In the third line, mouths without articulation ;
 In the sixth, mouths without breath :
 In the fourth line, eyes without vision ;
 And in the fifth line, ears without the sense of
 hearing.

“ The parallelism of the extreme members
 may be rendered yet more evident, by reducing
 the passage into two quatrains, thus :—

The idols of the heathen are silver and gold ;
 The work of men's hand :
 They who make them are like unto them ;
 So are all they who put their trust in them.

They have mouths, but they speak not ;
 They have eyes, but they see not ;
 They have ears, but they hear not ;
 Neither is there any breath in their mouths.”

There is a figure of speech, commonly exemplified in Hebrew poetry, variously named by rhetoricians. Among the terms employed to characterize it, the most commonly adopted are chiasmus, synchysis, epanodos, to the latter of which Bishop Jebb gives the preference. The *rationale* of this figure he explains in the following words—(Sacred Literature, p. 60.) “ Two pair of terms or propositions, conveying two important, but not equally important notions, are to be so distributed, as to bring out the sense in the strongest and most impressive manner: now, this result will be best attained by commencing and concluding with the notions to which prominence is to be given; and by

placing in the centre the less important notion, or that which, from the scope of the argument, is to be kept subordinate." I shall here produce one of Bishop Jebb's examples of this figure, from the hundred and seventh Psalm, verse 9:—

For he hath satisfied the craving soul,
And the famished soul he hath filled with goodness.

"Here are two pairs of terms, conveying the two notions of complete destitution by famine, and of equally complete relief, administered by the divine bounty. The notion of relief, as best fitted to excite gratitude, was obviously that to which prominence was to be given; and this, accordingly, was effected by placing it first and last: the idea of destitution, on the contrary, as a painful one, and not in unison with the hilarity of grateful adoration, had the central, that is, the less important place assigned it; while, even there, the rapid succession and duplication of the 'craving soul,' and the 'famished soul,' by marking the extremity of past affliction, but heightens the enjoyment of the glad conclusion—'he hath filled with goodness!'

"Let us now change the arrangement of the couplet; let us suppose it to have been written—

For the craving soul he hath satisfied;
And hath filled with goodness the famished soul;

and is it not manifest, not merely that the beauty of the passage would have been de-

stroyed, but that the very object of the Psalmist would have been defeated? The sense of relief would have been marred and incomplete. The notion of famine, meeting us at the commencement and haunting us at the close, must have checked the genial flow of grateful feeling.”* Some of Bishop Jebb’s examples are infinitely less happy; indeed, in several instances, the epanode is scarcely to be traced—at all events it would not be by the general reader.

I have been the more particular in pointing out these peculiar characteristics of Hebrew poetry, because in examining the poetic portions of the Pentateuch, we shall find these characteristics, especially the three forms of parallelism first mentioned, frequently exhibited. In such parts of the writings of Moses as I am about to examine, there will be found some passages of difficult interpretation; but though obscurity confessedly prevails, in those sections of the sacred volume especially which are decidedly poetical, this frequently arises, not from any want of perspicuity in the authors of those sections, but from the circumstance that indirect allusions are constantly made to habits and modes of life, to civil and social customs, some, indeed many of which, have ceased with the lapse of time, though others still exist; consequently, much light may be thrown upon various dark passages of the sacred volume by a familiarity with the works of oriental writers; nay, even

* Sacred Literature, pp. 61, 62.

from those of modern travellers in the east, considerable information upon this momentous matter may be obtained.

It will be remembered that the Bible is an eastern book, produced exclusively by oriental authors, under divine inspiration, and that consequently a certain acquaintance with eastern history, with the manners, customs, laws, and political economy of the people of the country in which it was composed, is positively essential to the perfect understanding of it. Throughout the entire continent of Asia, the social changes, since the time of Moses, have been surprisingly few, compared with those which have taken place in the other great divisions of the world. In China and Hindostan, the same laws, the same religion, the same domestic customs, the same modes of agriculture, the same applications of mechanical science prevail, as existed in the days of the patriarchs, when the Israelites were wanderers in the wilderness, where their law-giver, no doubt, composed his divine history. It is maintained by many eminent eastern archaologists that, at the present moment, there exist among the Hindoos written records as ancient as the Pentateuch, showing that at that remote period of their history, this extraordinary people, though plunged in the intellectual darkness of a most gross and sensual idolatry, were scarcely behind the ancient Greeks, who subsequently captivated the world by shedding upon it the rich effulgence of their poetry and eloquence, in that mental preeminence by which the latter at once amazed

and delighted mankind. It is indisputable that an eminent sect, the followers of Pythagoras, imbibed the most remarkable of their tenets, the transmigration of souls, from the sages of Hindostan, the celebrated Gymnosophists of that country, a doctrine maintained both by Empedocles and Socrates, and supported by Plato.

We shall cease then to be surprised, that after an interval of from three to four thousand years, there should be found difficulties in the Bible arising from allusions to certain things then commonly known, but peculiar to an enlightened race, placed in a part of the world where the habits and modes of life must at all times differ from those of countries subject to so many opposite conditions of nature, and regulated by a political, moral, and ecclesiastical legislation, so entirely different in every imaginable respect. Even at this moment, many of the domestic customs of India throw considerable light upon numerous passages in the Bible, which are merely obscure because the mass of readers are unacquainted with those customs: we should not, therefore, rashly shift our ignorance upon the presumed obscurity of the sacred volume, when this might be often found perfectly intelligible if we would only be at common pains to render it so by going to those sources of information which would relieve it of its imagined perplexities.

In the prophecies of Isaac, of Jacob, of Balaam, and of Moses, to which I shall have to direct the reader's attention in the following

pages, we shall find some passages of peculiar difficulty; but while I endeavour to give the most reasonable exposition which my own deep consideration of the subject has enabled me to arrive at, and which will be offered with all humility and with all due deference to established authorities, I shall at the same time endeavour to point out the remarkable beauty of those prophetic songs, looking at them as compositions of the very rarest order, and deserving, even apart from their inspiration, our highest regard for their singular elevation of thought, appropriateness of imagery, felicity of illustration, and sublimity of expression; all which qualities I hope to make appear in the course of this work. My great object will be, not only to render intelligible, but to elicit admiration for, those portions of the Mosaic writings generally held to be inscrutable to the common reader, and while I point out their meaning, to make manifest their exquisite beauty.

CHAPTER VI.

*The most ancient specimen of Hebrew poetry considered.
Different versions of it. Parallel passage from a poem
of Lord Byron's. Its inferiority to the Hebrew.*

THE most ancient specimen of Hebrew poetry now known, is the address of Lamech to his wives in the fourth chapter of Genesis, already alluded to. It is altogether a passage of difficult interpretation; though this signifies little, so far as my present purpose is concerned, as it evidently refers to some fact out of the usual order of events which Moses was recording, and therefore the readers of Holy Writ will not suffer any loss in not being able precisely to comprehend this dark saying. How Moses received it, whether from oral tradition, or from documentary authority, is a matter of no moment. He has recorded it, and the internal evidence which it bears of being an original fragment of antediluvian poetry, seems to have satisfied all reasonable inquirers.

“We may add,” says the learned Michaelis, “that poetry is much less likely to be corrupted than prose. So faithful a preserver of truth is metre, that what is liable to be changed, augmented, or violated, almost daily in prose, may continue for ages in verse, with-

out variation, without even a change in the obsolete phraseology."

Although the passage referred to in the fourth chapter of Genesis is one of considerable obscurity, and much inferior in the higher characteristics of poetry to many portions which follow, even in the Pentateuch, where metrical compositions are only occasionally found, it is nevertheless strikingly distinguished by the attributes of poetry, as I hope presently to show. Its darkness of meaning naturally renders the poetical colouring less obvious, the poetical conformation, however, will arrest observation; the former, moreover, in spite of the obscurity with which the whole passage is shrouded, is manifestly there, as I shall endeavour to make appear, and the artificial construction of the entire fragment cannot well escape the notice of the most indifferent observer.

The words in our authorized version of the Holy Scriptures are as follows:—

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech;
For I have slain a man to my wounding,
And a young man to my hurt:
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

It will be seen even in this rendering, which I have broken into hemistichs to correspond with the original text, that the whole structure of the passage is unprosaic. It is artificial in the highest degree:—

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech.

Here is distinctly a synonymous parallelism, according to Lowth's definition, but which Bishop Jebb, as I have already observed, with nicer discernment, distinguishes by the name of cognate parallelism, there being a close relationship but not an absolute identity. In the couplet just quoted, although there is a near correspondency between the two members, the repetitions convey an impression of tenderness perfectly germane to true poetry. The patriarch first mentions the names of Adah and Zillah simply, then immediately heightens the pathos by addressing them as his wives. It will be seen that the second clause diversifies the preceding by a beautiful and tender additament, rising above it and forming a climax in the sense. It is this which so sweetly enhances the pathos. Adah and Zillah did not require to be told by Lamech that they were his wives, for of this they were both fully sensible; but there is a strong blending of dignity with pathos, in his recalling to their minds, although they already knew it, that they were addressed by their husband, for whom, in the patriarchal times, wives entertained the most profound respect, to listen to the voice of one who claimed that respect above all other men. Ye wives of Lamech! How emphatic, and yet at the same time how affectionately simple is this mode of address! There is a primitive simplicity and gentle earnestness in it which immediately enlists our sympathies. It moreover rescues the passage from that colloquial familiarity inseparable from the or-

dinary forms of speech, and elevates it without in the slightest degree detracting from its tenderness. Then the reduplication in the second clause, "hearken unto my speech," is a gradation of force in the command, as if he had said—not only listen to, but regard what I say. "Hear," signifies simply to listen, but "hearken," to listen attentively. The euphonious collocation of the words, too, even in our common version of this fragment, cannot escape attention. The arrangement is extremely musical:—

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech.

Not only is the pathos greatly strengthened by this parallel disposition of the phrases in these two hemistichs, but there is a distinct rhythm conveyed, which carries to the ear almost the melody of a perfect metrical cadence. Will it be denied that the whole frame and contexture of this passage is essentially poetical, both in construction and sentiment? In the second couplet we find a similar amplification:—

For I have slain a man to my wounding,
And a young man to my hurt.

Here again the cognate parallelism may be traced, the parallel terms heightening the sense, and not only so, but producing likewise a euphony, incomplete indeed, yet such as can scarcely fail to strike the most unmusical ear; for although the English words are not cast into verse, they follow to a certain extent that

rhythmical arrangement peculiar to verse, and upon which one of its greatest charms depends; and this they have evidently derived, not from the design of our translators, but independent of it; in fact, solely from the metrical construction of the Hebrew. The same may be said of the final couplet as of the two preceding.

Among the "additions" to Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, published by C. Taylor, the writer observes—"The first thing remarkable in Hebrew poetry is, a duplication of phraseology, so constructed, that the memory, by recollecting one member of the sentence, could not fail of recollecting the other. The earliest specimen extant, exemplifies this throughout. Lamech, the first man who married two wives (sisters perhaps), intent on calming their apprehensions for his safety, does not say in plain prose, 'no one will be so unjust as to kill me for this trifling transgression;' but he puts his argument into verse, and by this means it has been preserved; because the memory retained it with ease and certainty: the names of the parties, once known, recal the whole when repetition is contemplated.

*Adah and Zillah,
Ye wives of Lamech,
Have I slain a man
A young man
If Cain shall be avenged
Much more Lamech*

hear my voice;
hearken to my speech;
in bloody contest,
in violent assault?
seven times,
seventy seven times.

"The first column, if read separately, opens the history; but the second column, by its duplication of phraseology, perfects the series of

thoughts, and converts the whole into verses and poetry." What is here said suggests to my mind a very satisfactory presumption, that the patriarch's address to his wives, above quoted, is strictly a metrical composition.

It may be well here to offer some explanation of this obscure passage, about the true meaning of which there is still much doubt. It would appear that Lamech had slain some person, most probably in self-defence, from the tone of self-justification evident in the last distich of this singular fragment. He therefore endeavours to remove all apprehension from the minds of his wives, by telling them that if Cain, after he had slain a brother, without provocation, was protected by the Almighty, who threatened death to any one attempting the destruction of that signal offender, much more should he, Lamech, be protected, who had been only guilty of an act of justifiable homicide. If, says he, the murderer of Cain shall be punished sevenfold, certainly he who should destroy Lamech would be punished in a seventy and sevenfold degree.

Dr. Shuckford supposes there is an ellipsis of some preceding speech or circumstance, which, if known, would cast light upon this dark subject. In the antediluvian times, the nearest of kin to a murdered person had a right to revenge his death by taking away the life of the murderer. This, as we have already seen, appears to have contributed not a little to Cain's horror, (verse 14.) Now we may suppose that the descendants of Cain were in continual alarms,

lest some of the other family should attempt to avenge the death of Abel on them, as they were not permitted to do it on Cain; and that in order to dismiss those fears, Lamech, the seventh descendant from Adam, spoke to his wives to this effect—‘Why should you render yourselves miserable by such ill-founded fears? We have slain no person; we have not done the least wrong to our brethren of the other family; surely then reason should dictate to you that they have no right to injure us. It is true that Cain, one of our ancestors, killed his brother Abel; but God, willing to pardon his sin, and give him space to repent, threatened to punish those with a sevenfold punishment who should dare to kill him. If this be so, then those who should have the boldness to kill any of us, who are innocent, may expect a punishment still more rigorous. For if Cain should be avenged sevenfold on the person who should slay him, surely Lamech, or any of his innocent family, should be avenged seventy-sevenfold on those who should injure them.’* The Targums give nearly the same meaning; and if the second couplet be read interrogatively, and in the following sense—

Have I slain a man, that I should be wounded,
Or a young man, that I should be bruised?

Dr. Shuckford’s interpretation will appear a reasonable one; but after all, the true meaning of the passage must be left to conjecture.

* See Dr. Adam Clarke’s note.

I now beg leave to lay before the reader two translations of this difficult passage, in both of which it is divided, as in the Hebrew, into three distichs after the first line. Dr. Adam Clarke, a good Hebrew scholar and judicious critic, renders it thus:—

And Lamech said unto his wives,
Adah and Zillah, hear my voice ;—
Wives of Lamech, hearken to my speech,
For I have slain a man for wounding me,
And a young man for having bruised me.
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Surely Lamech seventy and seven.

This reading corresponds, precisely, with the exposition first given, and makes a very clear sense. Bishop Lowth's version is as follows:—

Hadah and Sillah, hear my voice :
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken to my speech :
For I have slain a man because of my wounding,—
A young man, because of my hurt.
If Cain shall be avenged seven times,
Certainly Lamech seventy and seven.

This differs little from Dr. Adam Clarke's translation, and neither differs essentially from our authorized version. Both examples are sufficiently intelligible, and fully justify the interpretation first proposed. Bishop Lowth's, however, I take to be the best rendering, as it gets rid of the copulative conjunction in the fourth line, which seems to imply that two persons were killed, and is, therefore, one of the main causes of that obscurity which invests this early fragment of Hebrew poetry.

“ There is no more reason,” says Michaelis,
“ to distinguish here between the youth and the

man, than to suppose Adah and Zillah other than the wives of Lamech, who are mentioned in the next line." In fact, it is nothing more than one of those cognate parallelisms with which the Hebrew poetry abounds, and by which it is especially distinguished.

"If," says Bishop Lowth, "we consider the apt construction of the words in this address of the patriarch, the exact distribution of the words into three distichs, and the two parallel and, as it were, corresponding sentiments in each distich, I apprehend it will be easily acknowledged an indubitable specimen of the poetry of the first ages."

Houbigant, a commentator of much celebrity, and certainly a very judicious one in many instances, translates the former part of the twenty-third verse:—

I, being wounded, have slain a man,
Being assaulted, a young man.

This translation Bishop Lowth approves. "It is ingenious," he says, "and I think, right, but it seems to want some further explanation, as well as confirmation. The speech of Lamech is an apology for homicide committed in his own defence upon some man who violently assaulted him, and as it appears, struck and wounded him. A homicide of this nature he opposes to the voluntary and inexcusable fratricide of Cain."*

A new interpretation has been given to this

* See Notes to Lowth's Fourth Prælection.

somewhat intractable passage, by Mr. Henley, of Rendlesham. His arguments are undoubtedly ingenious, but I cannot think them conclusive. "There is nothing in the context," writes this acute commentator, "to induce a suspicion that Lamech had committed murder. By taking to himself two wives, he first violated the divine institution of marriage. Such an offence was likely to draw upon him the resentment of his kindred, expose him to a particular quarrel, perhaps with his brother, and fill his wives with fear, lest he should be provoked to follow the example of Cain. To remove, therefore, their apprehensions, he thus expostulates with them, contrasting the offences of bigamy and murder:—

Hadah and Sillah, hear my voice ;
 Ye wives of Lamech, attend to my speech ;
 Have I slain a man in my contest—
 Yea, one born among my kindred ?
 If Cain shall be avenged seven times,
 Assuredly shall Lamech seventy times seven."

In this version, the parallelism in the second couplet is abandoned ; it is, moreover, so opposed to all other versions with which I am acquainted, that the weight of a single authority, however respectable, cannot justly be permitted to supersede the judgments of a great majority of commentators. Besides, we can scarcely suppose that Moses would have passed over, without comment, "the first violation of the divine institution of marriage," had he considered it an offence of so grave a nature, as to put Lamech's life in jeopardy. And fur-

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then, how does Mr. Henley come at the fact, that Lamech was the first man "who violated the divine institution of marriage?" Can he show that any of Cain's posterity before Lamech, had not more than one wife? the silence upon this matter of the Hebrew historian is no proof to the contrary. Cain himself, or any of his offspring, were as likely to have infringed this law as Lamech, and probably the two wives of the latter would not have been mentioned, had they not furnished the inspired author of the Pentateuch with an opportunity of recording a fragment of antediluvian poetry. I feel the more justified in my own mind in taking this view of the case as, if Moses had considered the fact, to which the lines quoted by him refer, of any importance, he would not have passed it over without a single observation. He evidently does not record it as an example to the Israelites against a breach of law; but merely, as it appears to me, introduces the passage as a poetical embellishment of his narrative.

Herder, a modern German critic of great celebrity in his own country, entertains a very singular notion of this fragment. He says, in his "Spirit of Hebrew Poetry,"* a work of extreme erudition and eloquence, "there is a single poem here, Lamech's on the invention of the sword, for this, according to the context and sound interpretation, is the import of it, not an unfeeling expression of joy at the murder of Cain. It has a metrical relation of numbers,

* Vol. i. p. 264. See the Translation by James Marsh.

and even correspondencies of sound. The parallelism occurs in it, and you thus perceive how ancient it is. Lyric poetry and music are invented in the same age, and in one and the same family. The former was the daughter of the latter, and they have always been united. In short, here is this brief triumphal song; but I can only give it without correspondencies of sound—without rhyme.

Ye wives of Lamech hear my voice
And hearken to my speech.
I slew a man who wounded me,
A youth, who smote me with a blow.
If Cain shall be seven times avenged,
Then Lamech, seventy times seven.

“He felt thus forcibly the superior efficacy of iron and of the sword, against the onset of other deadly weapons.” But why Lamech should have addressed such a song to his wives it is difficult to conjecture. Besides, the learned German advances no satisfactory reasons for this conclusion, and in the absence of such reasons, I am content to take the more generally received expositions of those learned men, who sanction the sense which I have given.

I may here mention a somewhat singular coincidence of the same sort of parallelism, as occurs in the fragment to which the reader's attention has been just directed, in a modern poem of great celebrity, though perhaps more celebrated from the circumstance that produced it, than for the intrinsic merit of the poem itself, although this I admit to be of a high order. I

allude to the stanzas written by Lord to Lady Byron, after their separation, entitled, "Fare thee well." Like the Hebrew verses, they were addressed by the noble author to his wife, and commence as follows:—

Fare thee well! and if for ever,
Still for ever, fare *thee well!*

Here is, evidently, a specimen of synonymous parallelism in the words, though not in the sense, because the latter is diverted from its natural and proper acceptation. The above couplet differs from the Hebrew specimen in this particular; the parallels are inverted, this inversion being necessary to the flow of the rhythm, and the alternation of the rhyme.

The parallelism in Lord Byron's lines not extending to the sense is, in my opinion, a great blemish. It subtracts from the earnest simplicity and tenderness of the passage. There is now an evident equivoke on the latter "fare thee well," which entirely subverts the dignity and pathos of the couplet. It bears quite a different interpretation from the first, as it now stands. This is indicated by the concluding words of the second line being printed in italics, to show that it is read as a phrase, not as a mere compound expression. The following I therefore take to be the meaning of the couplet, as Lord Byron intended it,—*"Fare-thee-well! and if thou hast resolved that it shall be for ever, nevertheless to prove that my kindly feelings towards thee have not abated, in consequence*

of this stern determination, I wish that thou mayest still fare well—that is, in common parlance, be happy, for ever.” This distich is a complete epanode, beginning and ending with the parallel clause, as in Bishop Jebb’s example, before quoted, (page 65.) In the affecting quality of tenderness it must yield to the Hebrew, to which it bears so direct a conformity, though this is no doubt perfectly casual; while in pathetic simplicity and natural warmth of expression, Lamech’s address to his wives greatly surpasses the parallel lines from Lord Byron’s poem on a similar subject. Had the noble author substituted *then* for *still* in the second line, without warping the interpretation of the final “fare thee well,” the parallelism, both in sense and expression, would have remained unimpaired, and the tenderness have been greatly heightened;—*e. g.*

Fare thee well ! and if for ever,
Then for ever, fare thee well !

This would have been a beautiful duplication, the second line only rising above the first in tenderness by the mere effect of repetition, the parallelism both in sense and expression being exactly preserved. As it now stands it is artificial, canting and equivocal. Had Lord Byron strongly felt what he was writing, when he composed this farewell address to his wife, there would have been no room in his heart for such trifling as a play upon words.

I have dwelt the longer upon the first short

fragment of Hebrew poetry found in the Bible, because it is undoubtedly the most ancient specimen of verse extant; for I am decidedly of opinion that it is strictly metrical, and is therefore extremely curious, as exhibiting how far the art of poetry had advanced in that very remote period of perfectly inartificial antiquity to which this singular fragment manifestly belongs. And from this specimen we are led to infer, that in those primitive times the inhabitants of the earth were acquainted with the laws of versification, which had no doubt been established, as I have already intimated, in the very earliest antediluvian ages.

To what extent metre was employed at a period when all arts were in their infancy, and many yet in the womb of time and only brought to a state of parturition after a long lapse of ages, it is vain to inquire; for even now scarcely any thing is known of Hebrew prosody, not sufficient certainly to enable us to come to any definite conclusion upon the exact form of the primitive measures. Nevertheless, upon the poetical construction of some of the obscurest passages in the sacred volume there can be no mistake; and the decidedly metrical books of the Old Testament, such as Solomon's Song, the Book of Job, the Proverbs, the Psalms, and parts of the Prophecies, which are compositions exhibiting all the highest resources of the poetic art, leave no room to question the supremacy of the Hebrews in the sublimest order of composition, above every other people in this or sub-

sequent times. It can scarcely excite surprise that so large a portion of the divine oracles, and especially those portions containing express revelations from God himself, should have been couched in those terms which most readily elevate the soul, and this is the especial province of poetry. I need not tell the intellectual reader that the soul delights to be elevated,—to be lifted up above this gross earth, and carried into those regions where it will finally enjoy the pure bliss of its everlasting spiritualization; but in confirmation of this obvious truth, I shall close this chapter with a beautiful extract from Aken-side's "Pleasures of Imagination."

The high born soul
 Disdains to rest her heaven-aspiring wing
 Beneath his native quarry. Tired of earth
 And this diurnal scene, she springs aloft
 Through fields of air; pursues the flying storm;
 Rides on the vollied lightnings through the heavens;
 Or, yoked with whirlwinds and the northern blast,
 Sweeps the long tract of day. Then high she soars
 The blue profound, and, hovering round the sun
 Beholds him pouring the redundant stream
 Of light; beholds his unrelenting sway
 Bend the reluctant planets to absolve
 The fated rounds of Time. Thence, far effused,
 She darts her swiftness up the long career
 Of devious comets; through its burning signs
 Exulting measures the perennial wheel
 Of Nature, and looks back on all the stars,
 Whose blended light, as with a milky zone,
 Invests the orient. Now amazed, she views
 The empyreal waste, where happy spirits hold,
 Beyond this concave heaven, their calm abode;
 And fields of radiance, whose unfading light
 Has travelled the profound six thousand years,
 Nor yet arrives in sight of mortal things.
 E'en on the barriers of the world, untired,
 She meditates the eternal depth below;

'Till, half-recoiling, down the headlong steep
She plunges ; soon o'erwhelmed and swallowed up
In that immense of being. There her hopes
Rest at the fated goal. For, from the birth
Of mortal man, the Sovereign Maker said
That not in humble nor in brief delight,
Nor in the fading echoes of Renown,
Power's purple robe, nor Pleasure's flowery lap,
The soul should find enjoyment ; but from these
Turning disdainful, to an equal good
Through all the ascent of things enlarge her view,
'Till every bound at length should disappear,
And infinite perfection close the scene.

CHAPTER VII.

Noah's malediction and blessings on his sons poetical. Condensation a prominent feature of the early Hebrew writers. Metre essential to poetry properly so called. The distinguishing qualities of prose and poetry oppugnant. The flowers of poetry not generally favourable to prose. The style of Jeremy Taylor not improved by them. Superiority of Hooker's style. An exposition and critical analysis of the curse and blessings of Noah.

THE second specimen of Hebrew poetry which presents itself in the first book of the Pentateuch, is the malediction of Noah upon Ham, who had been guilty of an act of filial irreverence, a very heinous sin in those times of severe simplicity, when the father had a right by law, as well as a claim by nature, to the unqualified obedience of his own family, over whom he exercised an absolute jurisdiction. The passage stands thus in our Bibles:—

Cursed be Canaan !
A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.
Blessed be the Lord God of Shem !
And Canaan shall be his servant.
God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem ;
And Canaan shall be his servant.

(Genesis ix. 25—27.)

This is surely very different from the language of ordinary prose. No one can fail to perceive that there is a certain artifice of management

which places it out of the common order of composition. Besides its being written in hemistichs, the structure of the clauses, the repetition of the curse, forming a sort of burthen to each clause, the antithetical position of the curse and blessing, and the strong figures employed in both, show at once to what class of composition this remarkable extract belongs. Let the reader compare it with the passages which immediately precede it, and he will at once perceive that he has passed from prose to poetry. The style is highly sententious, and the sense strikingly condensed. It is astonishing how much is expressed in a few ordinary words, for no graces of rhetoric are employed, and yet the whole passage is eminently expressive. In six lines are comprised three prophecies, foretelling the future condition of the only three families by which the world after the deluge was to be peopled. There is something extremely imposing in the vast importance of this short prediction, involving, as it does, the destinies of the whole human race, and pointing to a remote future, in which those destinies, here obscurely glanced at, were ultimately realized in exact conformity with this prophetic announcement, in the very first age of the postdiluvian world. The extreme condensation of style tends to wrap these early predictions in considerable obscurity; they nevertheless derive great force and expressiveness from that condensation, which elevates them to the simple but positive dignity of poetry. The sententious style naturally assumes a poetical tone of expression, and as a judicious critic has

justly observed, "always reduces a composition to a kind of metrical form."* For, as Cicero remarks, "in certain forms of expression there exists such a degree of conciseness, that a sort of metrical arrangement follows of course. For when words or sentences directly correspond, or when contraries are opposed exactly to each other, or even when words of similar sound run parallel, the composition will in general have a metrical cadence."†

Although this remark of the Roman orator is no doubt true to a certain, but only to a certain extent, it must be taken with considerable latitude of allowance; it will by no means bear a literal interpretation, since it is certain that no collocation of words, however happily disposed with reference to the euphony of sentential cadence, can form, apart from the rigid exactitude of metrical arrangement, a true poetical rhythm. This is governed by laws as arbitrary as the bars of music, and demand as strict a conformity. The melodious flow of verse can never escape the most unmusical ear, while that of prose, being much more undefined and subject to no direct laws of regulation, will often scarcely be perceptible, however skilfully the periods are terminated and the cadences produced, even to ears sufficiently susceptible of metrical harmony. It must nevertheless be admitted, that poetical phrases, not reduced to metre, may be employed in prose with undoubted advantage; but notwithstanding that this may unquestionably be done in some

* See Lowth's Fourth Prælection.

† Orator.

instances, although those instances are rather exceptions from a general rule than belonging to an established law of composition, still these phrases, not being directly akin to the language which they are made use of to embellish and enliven, at once lead the ear out of the prose construction, and immediately carry the mind to the specific beauties of that art by which, after all, the finest poetry is sustained in the most elevated dignity of its character; for look where we may in the literature of any civilized country, we shall find no poetry that really deserves attention as such only, which is not subjected to the discipline of metre. It will, moreover, be invariably found, that wherever highly poetic are blended with extremely prosaic forms of expression, the former are eminently deteriorated by such uncongenial juxtaposition—in fact, the natural force of both is neutralized. Inversions of phrase, for instance, which are decided ornaments in poetry, when judiciously employed, are frequently great deformities in prose—nay, they never really become it, and the very constituents of excellence are so opposed, that the application of the one to the other would mar the specific beauty of both.

Is not the natural concinnity of prose composition, for the most part, thrown aside, if not utterly abandoned, when those extreme embellishments of rhetorick, which, though of themselves, abstractedly, they may be called extravagancies, become nevertheless the true and essential concomitants of a poetical diction,

are employed to adorn it? It is indeed true, that what are called the "flowers of poetry" may be found in the works of many of our most celebrated prose authors, but they serve rather to distinguish than adorn their pages, although they unquestionably are in some instances, but only to a certain extent in any instance, the cause of their celebrity as writers. Even in the works of Jeremy Taylor, whose writings are frequently distinguished by strong figures, violent metaphors, and florid images, what are called the poetical beauties of his prose, are often nothing better than happy conceits, or fanciful and ingenious illustrations, showing more decidedly an exuberant fancy than a sober and well-regulated judgment. In my opinion, his strong and quaint eloquence, his generally vigorous but almost rustic simplicity, are marred by his attempted flights of oratory and elaborate declamation; and to my apprehension, his most rhetorical passages are the least valuable. He often introduces blemishes, where he evidently sought to add embellishments. Let any reader of taste, take the stately, sustained, but purely simple prose of Hooker, and compare it with that of Jeremy Taylor, he will then, I am sure, soon perceive the superiority of a plain, majestic prose style, over that of a highly ornate poetical one. Hooker neither discards metaphors nor figures, but he uses them with a temperate discretion; Jeremy Taylor employs them with such lavish profusion, that the varied and gaudy efflorescence at times completely hides the more grateful verdency of the pasture.

If we compare the poetry of Homer with the prose of Plato, the poetry of Virgil with the prose of Tacitus, the poetry of Dante with the prose of Machiavelli, the poetry of Milton with the prose of Swift, we shall find the two writers of each nation referred to differing as essentially in the means by which they excite the admiration of their readers, as if the elements of excellence in each were derived altogether from perfectly opposite sources. But I have already carried this digression too far, I therefore return to the subject of Noah's malediction and blessing, thus rendered by Bishop Lowth:—

Cursed be Canaan !
 A servant of servants to his brothers let him be !
 Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem,
 And let Canaan be their servant !
 May God extend Japheth,
 And may he dwell in the tents of Shem,
 And let Canaan be their servant !

Here again that artificial construction of the several clauses, which so essentially distinguishes poetry from prose, is sufficiently perceptible. The passage consists of two couplets and a triplet, containing three remarkable prophecies, and renewing, as it were, the promise made to our unhappy progenitors in Paradise, when under the condemnation consequent upon their transgression—namely, that a deliverer should spring from the seed of the woman, who would “bruise the serpent's head,” or emancipate their posterity from his thralldom.

The blessing pronounced upon Shem by Noah,

may be considered a confirmation, or rather a renewal of that promise; for from his direct posterity the Messiah was to spring: and it will be remarked, that in the blessings here evoked, as well as in the curse, the terms of both apply, not to Shem, Japheth, and Canaan, respectively, in their own persons, but to their distant descendants. Of this curse and blessing, as well as of the benedictions of Isaac and Jacob, obtested by each upon their sons, Bishop Lowth remarks, (see his Fourth Prælection,) “The great importance of these prophecies, not only to the destiny of the people of Israel, but to that of the whole human race, renders it highly probable that they were extant in this form before the time of Moses; and that they were afterwards committed to writing by the inspired historian, exactly as he had received them from his ancestors, without presuming to bestow upon these sacred oracles any adventitious ornaments or poetical colouring.”

It will be observed, that the first hemistich in this singular prediction, is a broken or short line, by no means correspondent with the second verse of the couplet; whence some commentators imagine that there has been an omission by the copyist, and that the reading should be—

Cursed be Ham, the father of Canaan!

With this view I am fully disposed to concur, as these very words are previously used in the twenty-second verse, and this reading, repeated in the twenty-fifth verse, is moreover found in the Arabic version. Ham was probably

mentioned as the father of Canaan, to show that from him would proceed those Canaanites who, in the days of Moses, outraged the religion of their forefathers by the grossest idolatries, on which account they finally fell under the domination of the Israelites, the descendants of Shem, and were reduced to extreme misery. Their moral degradation is painted in the most repelling colours in the eighteenth and twentieth chapters of Leviticus. The fulfilment of the curse and blessings pronounced by Noah on his sons, are remarkably traced in the Sacred Records.

If we read the first line as proposed—

Cursed be Ham, the father of Canaan !

it will render the whole passage more consistent and complete, by naming the three sons of the patriarch, instead of two and his grandson, the offspring of Ham, when there seems less reason that Ham should be omitted than the other two, since he was the immediate cause of the curse and blessings being pronounced.

“Whether,” observes Herder,* “Canaan participated in his father’s offence, or not, he naturally participated in the punishment, for when the father was deprived of his filial rights, his children must suffer with him. So it is now, in regard to all family misfortunes, and it seems to me, that Noah inflicted a punishment, which, according to the then prevailing customs and mode of thinking, if not

* Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, vol. i. p. 220.

light, was yet not unjust; ignominy with ignominy, scorn with scorn, insult with insult."

In the extract now under examination, it will be found that there are three divisions of verses, concluding with an indignant repetition of one of the preceding lines, thus adding to the force of the malediction pronounced against Canaan, through whom it likewise reached his delinquent father; this prophetic declaration commencing and terminating with the curse, which was more emphatic than the blessings pronounced by Noah upon his righteous offspring, in consequence of the offence of his degenerate son.

Although it must be confessed that there is more force, from the happy condensation of the language, than grace or eloquence in the two couplets and concluding triplet, comprising the patriarch's curse and blessings upon his sons, they are nevertheless distinguished by high poetical attributes. The malediction is strongly emphatic—

A servant of servants to his brothers let him be!

that is, let him be in the lowest possible state of servitude—"a servant of servants"—a drudge, in the last degree servile and abject. As, however, this malediction refers, not to Ham personally, but to his posterity generally, it will signify, 'may the descendants of Ham live in a state of degrading vassalage to the descendants of Shem and Japheth'—for the term brethren, in the original text, frequently implies the most distant affinities.

The word Ham, according to Dr. Hales,

signifies black, and this name was peculiarly significant of the regions allotted to his family.

Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem !

A very remarkable distinction will be perceived in these words, between the curse pronounced upon Canaan, and the blessing addressed to Shem, besides the antagonist signification naturally belonging to each. As moral evil proceeds from man alone, the cursé is pronounced directly against the sinning agent, Ham, or against his son Canaan, who, it is probable—for the son would not have been personally cursed had he been a good man—accompanied his father to the tent, and joined in his act of filial irreverence towards the venerable patriarch ; but as all good is derivative and proceeds direct from God, Shem is blessed through the divine author of that good by whom he had been rendered worthy of the blessing, as Canaan was cursed through that parent who had entailed upon his posterity the punitive consequences of his own filial irreverence.

The word Shem signifies renown, and he who bore this name was renowned above his brethren, as being fixed upon by almighty God as the lineal ancestor of the blessed Emmanuel who was to expiate the guilt of men. There is something exceedingly imposing, and even sublime, in the idea of Shem being blessed, not directly in his own person, but indirectly through that august and omnipotent Being “ from whom all good things do come :” it imparts an air of extreme dignity to the whole

passage. How does it elevate the character of Shem! There is, besides the poetical grandeur, an impressive solemnity in the mode adopted of directing the chief force of the benedictory words upon the divine author of that good to be in future dispensed to the righteous son of the patriarch. Jehovah is "the God of Shem," as a pious man who had performed a grateful act of homage towards his heavenly, by reverencing the paternity of his earthly father, in contradistinction to the ungodly Ham, and his equally ungodly son Canaan, from whom the Deity had withdrawn his favour, in consequence of the filial irreverence of those undutiful descendants of the venerable Noah. The expression, however, "the God of Shem," must be taken with all necessary allowance for poetical amplitude. It must not be confined to a mere literal interpretation, as poetical phrases have always borne a conventional latitude of acceptation, which has been denied to the more ordinary forms of speech, and are therefore not to be straitened to a direct literal sense. Thus curtailed of their beautiful proportions, they would cease to charm, since they would then lose all their force, as well as beauty, by being stripped of their graceful and expressive accessories, and dilated into empty but inflated exaggerations.

The phrase, then, to which the reader's attention is now directed, means no more than that Jehovah was the God of Shem, by constituting him the medium of a pre-eminent blessing; by elevating him in an especial

manner above his reprobate brother, and even above Japheth, who, though a good man, appears nevertheless to have been inferior to his younger brother in piety; for Shem, though first in order of spiritual succession, was second in order of generation. Shem was more particularly distinguished by God, especially in his posterity, than either of his brothers, for from him the Messiah eventually proceeded; but Jehovah was, nevertheless, likewise the God of Japheth, whom Noah also signalized by pronouncing upon his posterity a remarkable blessing, although the latter was certainly less an object of personal distinction. The reward of filial reverence is strikingly marked in these auspicious predictions.

May God extend Japheth,
And may he dwell in the tents of Shem.

In the first clause of this passage, direct allusion is made to the name of Japheth, which signifies enlargement, or extension, and the benediction passed upon him is thus happily varied by this poetical reference to the signification of his name. In the patriarchal times, great importance appears to have been attached to names, and those were generally selected which had some specific relation to the child's birth, or some incidental signification relevant either to the positive character of the parent, or to the anticipated qualities of the offspring.

And may he dwell in the tents of Shem!

A forcible and picturesque expression, emi-

nently significative of domestic alliance, to represent the union of the posterities of the two righteous brothers; ultimately referring, no doubt, to subsequent ages, when in the more advanced maturity of time, they were to be brought into spiritual communion together, within the pale of the christian church.

Some commentators apply the pronoun *he*, in this hemistich—

And may *He* dwell in the tents of *Shem*,

to God; but the subsequent clause—

And let *Canaan* be *their* servant—

appears to me so evidently to refer to *Shem* and *Japheth* having the dominion over *Ham* in their posterities, that in any other sense the concluding words of the blessing would lose the obvious force of their application, as they would appear to signify that the descendants of *Canaan* should be the servants of God and of *Shem*, when the possessive pronoun clearly applies to the descendants of the two pious brothers.

I cannot forbear quoting some admirable reflections of Bishop Hall upon this interesting specimen of ancient Hebrew poetry. “How just a regard is here shown both to piety and disobedience! Because *Ham* sinned against his father, therefore he shall be plagued in his children. *Japheth* is dutiful to his father, and finds the reward of it in his posterity. Because *Ham* was an ill son to his father, therefore his sons shall be servants to his brethren. Because *Japheth* assisted *Shem* to bear the cloak of shame,

therefore shall Japheth 'dwell in the tents of Shem,' partaking with him in blessing as in duty. When we do but what we ought, yet God is gracious to us and rewards that, the omission of which would be a sin. Who could ever yet show me a man, rebelliously undutiful to his parents, that had prospered in himself and in his seed?"

It will be seen by this eloquent interpretation and paraphrase, made by one of the most learned and pious prelates of his time, how much is contained in the malediction and blessings delivered by the patriarch so shortly after the universal deluge, the figurative signification going much further than the literal meaning; and this is the specific province of poetry. There is a dignified condensation in the language, which elevates the ideas, and carries them out, as it were, of their simple elements, into a field where they seem to expand before the imagination, and to evolve new and beautiful tints of meaning, which would have escaped detection under an ordinary or more homely adaptation of phrase.

The beauties which I have endeavoured to point out may not, indeed, be obvious to numerous readers of the Sacred Volume; but it should be borne in mind, that some of the finest passages even of Shakspeare and of Milton, where they are involved in no obscurities to embarrass their meaning and render it difficult of apprehension, afford no mental relish to many who are utterly unable to appreciate them: yet surely no one in his senses would therefore deny that such passages are, in the extreme sense of

the word, poetical. And I have no hesitation in affirming, that with all the beauties, distributed as they frequently are with lavish profusion, which those celebrated authors just named exhibit in their works, they fall far, very far short of the prodigious sublimity and almost boundless variety of expression which everywhere pervades the poetry of the Bible. In order to appreciate this fully, however, the reader must carefully attend to the peculiar circumstances under which it was produced. "He," says Bishop Lowth,* "who would perceive and feel the peculiar and interior elegancies of Hebrew poetry, must imagine himself exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves. He must not attend to the ideas which, on a cursory reading, certain words would intrude upon his mind; he is to feel them as a Hebrew, hearing or delivering the same words, at the same time and in the same country. As far as he is able to pursue his plan, so far he will comprehend their force and excellence. This indeed, in many cases, it will not be easy to do; in some, it will be impossible; in all, however, it ought to be regarded, and in those passages especially in which the figurative style is found to prevail."

These observations of the learned prelate will apply, in their degrees, to all poetry in which lofty sentiments, sublime ideas, or references to celestial objects prevail. I might mention, as a singular example, the well-known and much-

* Fifth Prælection.

lauded poem of Faust, by the great Göethe, which appears to be perfectly intelligible to no commentator, either native or alien, who has attempted to illustrate it, though all German scholars of repute concur in pronouncing it one of the sublimest creations of human genius. I have never yet been so fortunate as to meet with a native German, and I have consulted several, who has appeared to entertain a clear conception of the author's intention in this very remarkable work: and not only so, but those Germans to whom I have applied, have been unable to give any thing like an intelligible elucidation of the many singularly dark passages to be found in it, which, like spots on the sun's disc, relieve the intensity of its brightness. This poem, I confess, has long appeared to me a literary problem; and certain it is that, however stupendous an emanation of human intellect it may be, we have yet no version of it in our language that renders it readable, or that elevates it much above the level of respectable mediocrity. Lord Francis Leveson Gower gave a metrical version of it some years since, which, could we for a moment suppose it to do full justice to the original, would place Göethe very much in the rear of the first class of poets, even of his own country, and the poets of Germany have never taken the very foremost stand among the sons of song. Distinguished as that country has been for her literature since the period of the Reformation, she has produced neither a Shakspeare nor a Milton, unless Göethe can be shown to equal either.

The several translations of Faust which have hitherto appeared in our own language, are already all but forgotten, and from the comparatively mean notion which they convey of the original, one might almost feel justified in coming to the conclusion that the elements of perpetuity do not exist in it. To say the truth, I cannot help thinking that it has been overrated, and that it will pass into oblivion before the lapse of the present century. I speak, however, with all due deference to higher judgments. What I have said, indeed, of this much-lauded, but little understood production, may rather show the inefficiency of the translators, than any inferiority in the poem itself, though I am still disposed to believe that the worst possible translation of a great work could not fail to preserve some of the elements of its greatness; yet it cannot be denied, that what Lord Byron, Shelley, and Coleridge have so highly commended, we may be justified in taking for granted to be really a composition of very rare merit. Nevertheless, after all that can be said in its favour, be that merit what it may, I do not fear to assert that the work of the philosophical German just referred to, cannot stand a moment's comparison with the sublimest productions of the Hebrews.

CHAPTER VIII.

Isaac's blessing on Jacob. Its poetical character. A knowledge of oriental customs much facilitates the interpretation of this passage. Its great poetic beauty and extreme condensation. Examples of the latter from the writings of Joanna Baillie and Milton.

THE next portion of the Pentateuch to which I beg to direct the reader's attention, as distinguished from the prosaic form, in which that portion of the Sacred Volume, with the exception of a few important passages, is written, is the blessing pronounced by Isaac upon his younger son Jacob, and that immediately after uttered at the earnest solicitation of Esau, his eldest born.* There is much poetical beauty in both these passages, and the obscurity of the first line will be removed by the knowledge of an eastern custom which I shall presently explain. As these blessings, like those pronounced by Noah on his two righteous sons, were prophetic, they are necessarily somewhat obscure, from the figurative turn of the language employed in all prophetic announcements in scripture, though nevertheless capable of a sufficiently clear exposition. The difficulties merely lie on the surface, and are therefore easily

* Genesis xxvii. 39, 40.

removed. Here follows the first passage, according to the authorized translation :*

See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed !

Therefore God give thee of the dew of Heaven,
And the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine :

Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee :

Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee :
Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that
blesseth thee.

“ The smell of my son,” alludes to the perfume of Esau’s raiment, which Jacob had assumed. It is supposed by the celebrated Bochart, Selden, Grotius, and others, that the goodly raiment in which Jacob had arrayed himself upon this solemn occasion, was the sacerdotal attire which belonged exclusively to Esau, as the first-born, and was worn only upon especial occasions. Esau, as the eldest son, possessed by natural inheritance the dignity of the priesthood, which was the unalienable right of primogeniture in the patriarchal families. Of this right the immediate descendants were particularly jealous, and through the entire Jewish economy we find the entailed privileges of primogeniture distinctly and signally acknowledged; and that their genealogies were strictly preserved, the Sacred Writings afford abundant proofs. In these genealogies the first-born always holds a distinguished place. He invariably succeeded to the paternal prerogatives, all his brethren and their offspring being subject to his domination; and

* Genesis xxvii. 27—29.

he was not only their temporal, but spiritual ruler—not only their patriarchal sovereign, so to speak, but their high-priest.

Such was the birthright which Esau sold to Jacob for a mess of pottage. The latter, possessing the privileges of primogeniture, transferred to him by this unholy covenant, no doubt considered himself entitled to the blessing which Isaac meditated pronouncing on his eldest son; and knowing that his father, who it is to be presumed was ignorant of the unrighteous transfer, would not swerve in his intention towards Esau, the privileged son and heir of the patriarchal inheritance, Jacob, at the instigation of his mother, he being her favourite, and justified, as we may suppose he imagined himself to be by the right which had been ceded to him, descended to an act of base dissimulation, in order to obtain the paternal benediction, which has considerably derogated from the otherwise generally strict integrity of his character. Disguised in the sacred and official habiliments of his elder brother, with a lie upon his lips, and base hypocrisy in his heart, he thus fraudulently received the blessing, designed by his blind and infirm parent for his first-born son.

“Jacob,” says Calmet, “imposed upon his father in three different ways. First, by words; ‘I am thy first-born Esau.’ Secondly, ‘by actions;’ he gave him kid’s flesh for venison, saying, he had executed his orders and had obtained it by hunting. Thirdly, ‘by his clothing;’ he put on Esau’s garments, and the kid’s skins upon his hands and the smooth of his neck. In short, he

made use of every species of deception that could be practised on the occasion, in order to accomplish his ends."

As the sacerdotal robes assumed by Jacob, in order to deceive his father, were only occasionally used, they were probably laid up with some strongly scented leaves, or aromatic drugs, in order to preserve them from the depredations of those destructive insects which abound in hot countries. "The natives of India," writes Mr. Joseph Roberts, in his *Oriental Illustrations*, page 32, "are universally fond of having their garments strongly perfumed, so much so that Europeans can scarcely bear the smell. They use camphor, civet, sandal wood, or sandal oil, and a great variety of strongly scented waters. It is not common to salute, as in England; they simply smell each other, and it is said, that some people know their children by the smell. It is common for a father or mother to say,—'Ah, child, thy smell is like the 'Sen-Paga-Poo.'*" The crown of the head is the principal place for smelling. Of an amiable man it is said, "How sweet is the smell of that man! the smell of his goodness is universal."

This is a curious illustration of the prophetic exclamation of the blind patriarch. Isaac, smelling the perfume of the sacred vestments which he knew belonged of right to Esau, and had, it is probable, been laid up in aromatic herbs, such being the custom of the age and country, pronounced without hesitation a benediction on

* A sacred flower.

the wearer, supposing it morally impossible that any but the rightful owner could presume to appear arrayed in them in his presence. He compares them to the smell of a field "which the Lord has blessed," by rendering it in the highest degree productive, causing it to bring forth abundance of odoriferous flowers and sweet smelling herbs,—a signal proof of the natural fecundity of the soil. The words are not only singularly significative, but full of poetry:—

The smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord
hath blessed.

The comparison is not merely to a field which brings forth in great profusion its vegetable stores, but to one upon which the divine blessings have been eminently shed; thus, by comparing his son to an object particularly blessed by the Almighty, the patriarch at once elevates Jacob to the dignity of divine communication, and signalizes him as likewise blessed; for by making him the subject of comparison with an object upon which a blessing has been shed, he signifies that such subject of comparison will be also the recipient of a blessing. He is not only "like a fruitful field," simply as he is in future to be the means of perpetuating a numerous posterity, but like a field blessed by God in an especial manner, and therefore the partaker of a divine blessing. The words have a signification of uncommon force, at the same time a poetical turn of simple but singular beauty is given to the whole passage; and even in our common version there is a remark-

ably perfect rhythm, considering that the metrical form of the original has not been retained:—

*See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field, which the Lord
hath blessed!*

It would be difficult to find any thing finer, and expressing so much in so few words, out of the sacred volume. It is an extremely felicitous specimen of condensation of language, combined with vast copiousness of thought. I will, however, here take leave to quote an example in a modern poet of deserved celebrity (Mrs. Joanna Baillie), of that significant conciseness of expression in which the mind is filled with the idea by a mere suggestion, and a short sentence rendered so pregnant with meaning as to produce almost an overwhelming effect upon the feelings. The passage to which I allude occurs in the tragedy of De Montfort, after he has murdered Rezenvelt. Whilst standing by the latter's body in a state of bitter mental agony, De Montfort exclaims—

*'Tis done, 'tis numbered with the things o'erpast!
Would—would it were to come!*

These four last words heave up, as it were, to view the entire depths of his bosom, and show how its dark recesses are invaded by the scorpions of unsubduable remorse. A similar example of intense power, of brief but picturesque expression, occurs in the first book of *Paradise Lost*. After Satan's address to the fallen spirits in the burning lake, the poet proceeds thus:—

*He spake, and to confirm his words, outflung
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty Cherubim ; the sudden blaze
Far round illumined hell.*

The four latter words of this quotation are wonderfully expressive. How they seem to fill the mind with one vast thought ! What an idea do they produce of multitude ! No calculation of numbers could have conveyed to the imagination an image by which so grand a conception of multitude would be realized. Both of the foregoing passages, however, fine as they undoubtedly are, and rising as they unquestionably do far above the ordinary efforts of the human intellect, fall, nevertheless, very short of the Hebrew passage in the combined excellencies of condensation, truth of adaptation, eloquence, and poetic amplification of meaning. It combines the sublime with the beautiful.

*Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven,
And the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.*

These expressions are in the highest degree figurative, representing the temporal prosperity which should fall upon the posterity of Jacob, in their possession of "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Throughout the country of Judæa, which was only visited with periodical rains, the vernal and autumnal, or, as they are termed in scripture, the early and latter rains, heavy dews always fell during the night, and thus the lack of moisture, which would have otherwise ensued from so long an interval of drought,

was supplied by those seasonable accumulations of vapour which, being condensed, descended in copious mists upon the land, thus preventing its becoming utterly barren.

The fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine,

are expressions clearly referring to the abundance to be expected from the earthly Canaan, or "promised land," a region eminently productive, and of which the posterity of Jacob were eventually to obtain possession. It was a fruitful, and might therefore be poetically styled a fat land, literally abounding with corn and wine; the former being in every country the staff of life, especially in the east, where animal food is very sparingly eaten, and the latter an eminent blessing, when temperately used, as the psalmist eloquently signifies in the following declaration of providential distribution:—

He [God] causeth the grass to grow for the cattle,
And herb for the service of man :
That he may bring forth food out of the earth ;
And wine that maketh glad the heart of man,
And oil to make his face to shine,
And bread which strengtheneth man's heart.*

Oil and wine are metaphors constantly employed in scripture, to express the blessings of great temporal abundance. These blessings were promised to the posterity of Jacob, but alas! how little grateful is the human heart, for such dispensations from the stores of a bountiful

* Psalm civ. 14, 15.

providence! The future is to us a land of shadowy dreams, in which we eagerly catch at phantoms that constantly elude our grasp. God and the eternal future pass from our thoughts, which are too much absorbed by the interests of time to be diverted, and we defer to to-morrow that preparation for the great concerns of eternity, which ought to be begun to-day. We may truly say, in the words of the Roman Satirist, so exquisitely rendered by our illustrious countryman Cowley, a rare but eccentric genius,—

Our yesterday's to-morrow now is gone,
And still a new to-morrow does come on;
We by to-morrows draw up all our store,
Till the exhausted well can yield no more.*

Let the people serve thee.

The blessing, which had before referred to mere territorial property, now refers to civil dominion. This part of the prophecy was signally fulfilled in the days of David, when the Moabites, Syrians, Philistines, and Edomites also, were reduced to subjection under him.

Be Lord over thy brethren.

Here the transfer of the birthright is confirmed to Jacob, and the forfeited right of primogeniture fully acknowledged. To the younger son the privileges of the first-born were thus indefeasibly communicated under a divine ratification. By this prophetic benediction, Jacob was made the happy instrument of con-

* Persius Sat. v. 68.

veying to all nations the divine promise in its plenary confirmation.—“In thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

The concluding words of the patriarch are almost an exact repetition of those addressed to Abraham, by God, when the promise above quoted was made.—“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.” (Gen. xii. 3.) The solemn antithesis of cursing and blessing with which this prediction closes, is strikingly impressive, and both members of the clause are balanced with the nicest and most agreeable precision.

It can scarcely escape the notice of the most unobserving reader, that the whole structure of this benediction is decidedly opposed to common prose. In every phrase the poetical character obtrudes; it is utterly impossible to lose sight of this. The expressions employed are bold and emphatic, besides being figurative far beyond what is found in compositions which are not metrical. In the line—

Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee—

the sense rises in a delicate but obvious gradation, “nations” being an advance upon “people,” and “bow down” upon “serve.” So likewise in the clause immediately succeeding—

Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee—

the gradation of phrase is preserved in “thy brethren,” and “thy mother’s sons,” which,

though parallel expressions, are not perfectly synonymous, but delicately work out the gradational parallelism, the latter phrase possessing an emphatic grace in the employment of the more touching correlatives, which do not exist in the former. These distinguishing features of artificial structure show us that we have passed from the prose context to the poetical sequence.

Not only was Jacob's posterity, as the conclusion of this singular benediction predicts, to have the dominion over the descendants of their collateral brethren, which latter term, in the patriarchal times, applied to all kindred affinities however remote, but the immediate descendants from his own parents in the line of Esau should acknowledge the domination of his.

Herder's observations upon the benedictions delivered by Isaac on his two sons are well worth transcribing. "Do you not perceive,"* he asks, "in both, the voice of destiny uttered even against the will of the father? Under the form of Esau, the other is fated to receive the blessing, and the father to utter for him what he intended to utter against him. All doubts and objections against these exclusive declarations fall to the ground, when we consider that they were not temporal blessings to which the chosen son was destined. His posterity were to guard the name and worship of Jehovah, and, from the time of Moses onward, to bear the yoke

* Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, vol. i. p. 235.

of the law—a blessing from which most nations would gladly have been relieved.” Herder’s version of these benedictions is very happy: the clauses are so distributed that the parallelisms become immediately obvious, and an extremely agreeable rhythm has been preserved by the American translator, who deserves great credit for the manner in which he has executed a task of no little difficulty. Herder’s version is thus rendered by Mr. James Marsh:—

Behold I smell my son, as the smell of a field,
Of a field, which God has blessed.
God give thee, therefore, of the dew of heaven,
The fatness of earth, and plenty of corn and wine.
Let the people serve thee,
And the nations bow down to thee;
Be thou ruler over thy brethren,
And let thy mother’s sons be subject to thee.
Cursed be every one that curseth thee,
And blessed be he that blesseth thee.

I confess the first couplet, in my judgment, is less beautifully rendered than in our authorized version. It has a more measured cadence, but is less simply impressive; nevertheless, the whole passage is much improved by being broken into pairs of lines, in which the parallelisms are rendered more obvious. The second couplet forms an agreeable anticlimax, gradually lessening or receding in importance; “the dew of heaven”—those cherishing dews which were, under the blessing of a divine dispensation, the cause of the earth’s increase; “the fatness of earth,” or a fruitful land, upon which the “dew of heaven” may not fall in vain, “and plenty of corn and wine,” the natural pro-

duce of a soil moistened by those fructifying communications from the stores of a bountiful providence;—these were the territorial blessings promised to the younger son of Isaac. Then follow the promises of temporal ascendancy, and here the gradational parallelism is employed with very graceful effect:—

Let the people serve thee,
And the nations bow down to thee!

There will be observed a decided augmentation of force in the corresponding terms, “people, nations, serve,” and “bow down.” The first signifies a single community, the second a number of communities. “Serve” implies the mere civil obligations which the ruled are under to the ruler, “bow down” has a signification of spontaneous fealty and reverence, in addition to those obligations. Thus it will appear, that although the correspondency in the terms is at once striking and bears the marks of design, they nevertheless greatly vary in force of interpretation.

Be thou ruler over thy brethren,
And let thy mother's sons be subject to thee.

This is not a mere repetition, but an emphatic declaration of the temporal superiority which the posterity of Jacob were to enjoy over those of Esau. The transferred rights which the younger had purchased from the elder brother are here confirmed to the former, and, with all their immunities, rendered hereditary in his family. There is something

exquisitely graceful in the nice distinction between "brethren" and "mother's sons:" the one may refer to kindred affinities, however remote; the other can only have reference to those nearly allied in blood. The latter is a term in which there is shown an extreme delicacy of perception, so far as poetical beauty of expression is concerned. Isaac does not say thy *father's* sons;—why? because the sexual opposition of the correlatives and the maternal character combining the obligation of tender, rather than of reverential affection, altogether offers a stronger appeal to the feelings, and gives a more affecting interest to the passage, than if the higher correlative had been employed. It at the same time carries our thoughts to the deceit of Rebecca, who, in securing the pre-eminence of her favourite son, sealed her own shame.

Let thy mother's sons be subject to thee,—

let the sons of that mother who has exalted thee and thine offspring at their expense, and at the price of her own ingenuousness, exhibit the consequences of their parent's fraudulent act, consequences which shall be a perpetual memorial of it. The allusion is very delicate, but I think very pointed. The antithetical parallelism in the concluding distich is too obvious to escape the notice of the most unpoetical reader.

CHAPTER IX. .

Isaac's benediction upon Esau. The pronouncing of curses and blessings a practice of the most primitive antiquity. Dread of the paternal malediction. Its influence. The testimony of Michaelis that poetry was familiar to the primitive races.

THE paternal benediction pronounced by Isaac upon his eldest son, falls as far short of that addressed to the younger brother in poetical force and beauty, as it does in the civil and political distinctions which it prospectively confers. It, nevertheless, corresponds very happily with the character of the man upon whom it was bestowed.

Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth,
And of the dew of heaven from above ;
And by thy sword shalt thou live and shalt serve thy brother ;
And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion,
That thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

Abundance is here promised to Esau, as it had previously been to Jacob ; but this abundance is widely different. There is no mention made of corn and wine ; even the territorial prosperity, therefore, of the one, was to be inferior to that of the other, though in this respect prosperity was promised to both. In temporal supremacy, however, there was a vast distinction in the promise. Jacob was

to possess absolute dominion in his posterity; Esau was to maintain a precarious security by the sword, which fully accorded with the martial spirit of the Edomites, who were the descendants of this patriarch. They were a fierce but brave people, delighting in hostility, and often obtaining a precarious subsistence in predatory warfare;—"their hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against them," as had been previously predicted of the descendants of Ishmael, whom they in many respects resembled; and the roving tribes of desert Arabs are at this day a living exemplification of that remarkable annunciation of the angel to the mother of Ishmael, before that patriarch was born.

Josephus says of the Edomites, that "they were a turbulent and disorderly nation, always ripe for commotions and rejoicing in changes; at the least adulation of those who beseech them, beginning war, and hastening to battle as to a feast." And "a little before the last siege of Jerusalem, they came, at the entreaty of the zealots, to assist them against the priests and people, and there, together with the zealots, committed unheard-of cruelties, and barbarously murdered Ananus, the high-priest, from whose death Josephus dates the destruction of the city." (Bishop Newton.)

Thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

In the reign of Jehoram, the Edomites revolted, being then under the dominion of Judah, and established an independent sovereignty; nor

were they again subjected to the yoke of Judah. It is remarkable, as Bishop Newton justly observes, that "the nation of the Edomites has been several times conquered and made tributary to the Jews, but never the nation of the Jews to the Edomites; and the Jews have been the more considerable people, more known in the world and more famous in history." "In what a most extensive and circumstantial manner," concludes the very able commentator just quoted, "has God fulfilled all these predictions! and what a proof is this of the divine inspiration of the Pentateuch, and the omniscience of God."

The third line in this prophecy is obviously not a strict grammatical rendering:—

And by thy sword shalt thou live and shalt serve thy brother.

The patriarch evidently did not mean to say that his elder son, or rather the descendants of that son, should live by the sword and serve those of the younger brother *by the sword*, but simply that they should live by warfare and plunder; nevertheless, that they should be under the dominion of Jacob's posterity, who would rule over them until they should "break the yoke from off their necks," which they did in the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah; having revolted, as I have already said, from under the dominion of Judah, and made themselves a king. "Jehoram made some attempts to subdue them again, but could not prevail, 'so the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day' (2 Chron. xxi. 8—10.) and hereby this part of the prophecy

was fulfilled, about nine hundred years after it was delivered." (Bishop Newton.) The line above referred to should consequently have been rendered—

By thy sword shalt thou live, and *thou* shalt serve thy brother,

which would at once obviate the incongruity in the sense and restore the grammatical construction. The repetition of the personal pronoun *thou* is manifestly indispensable to the true reading.

And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion.

By this we are not to understand that they should really obtain dominion over the seed of Jacob, but merely that they should render themselves independent, and possess a regular government, as they did when they elected a king to reign over them. The Jerusalem Targum gives a very satisfactory paraphrase of the whole passage, exhibiting a clear and intelligible exposition. "And it shall be, when the sons of Jacob attend to the law, and observe the precepts, they shall impose the yoke of servitude upon thy neck; but when they shall turn themselves away from studying the law, and neglect the precepts, behold, then shalt thou shake off the yoke of servitude from thy neck."

In the benedictions pronounced by Isaac upon Jacob and Esau, the evident constituents of poetry cannot fail to attract observation. I have shown them to exist in the former, and they will be found no less distinctly marked, though with some diminution of effect, in the

latter; still the artificial structure is alike manifest in both. The second and third verses of the blessing referring to the posterity of the patriarch's younger son, correspond very closely with those which refer to the posterity of the elder. There is, however, in the last, an inversion of the parallels, so that those terms which descend into an anticlimax in the one, naturally rise towards a climax in the other, a distinction which weakens the unpleasant monotony of repetition by an agreeable variation of the same expressions, at the same time communicating an effect of novelty; but bringing, nevertheless, to the mind the inferiority of Esau's blessing to Jacob's. Though similar, they are quite distinct, and the particulars in which they differ forcibly arrest the attention. There is no promise of corn and wine to the elder son; so that, although his posterity were to possess a fruitful soil, they, not being addicted to husbandry, were not to look for the fruits of honest industry, but to the acquisitions of rapine and predatory warfare. This trifling variation in the benediction strikingly signalizes the character of the Edomites. They had no taste for those pursuits by which the necessary aliments of life were, under divine favour, produced, and therefore to them abundance was not promised. They were a turbulent, unsettled race, able and disposed to enlarge their territorial possessions, but neither endowed with the capacity nor disposition to render those possessions, though plentifully furnished with the elements

of production, available to the demands of their physical wants.—They were to dwell in a land capable of producing in luxuriant plenty those supplies indispensable to all human communities; still those supplies were to be obtained, not by the pacific exercise of labour, but by sanguinary violence.

Herder thus renders the blessing extorted by Esau from the reluctant patriarch:—

In the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling,
And enriched with the dews of heaven above.
By thy sword shall thy life be sustained,
And thy brother shalt thou serve.
Yet the time shall arrive for thee to rule,
And his yoke shalt thou break from off thy neck.

This is a very intelligible rendering, and a poetical turn is given to the second couplet by the inversions employed, which produce a more agreeable cadence in the lines; nevertheless, I must confess that the words “by thy sword shalt thou live,” convey a juster idea than “by thy sword shall thy life be sustained,” which is rather a distorted sense, since the sword does not really *sustain* life, though it may be rendered the *means* of sustaining it. On the other hand, a man may with just propriety be said to live by the sword, because by the sword he procures those necessities whereby life is supported: the one expression is natural and clear, the other is artificial and embarrassed.

The poetical structure of this passage, as well as of the former, examined in the last chapter, is too obvious to escape attention. Even where the same gifts are promised, there is a slight

difference in the terms, which difference, as I have endeavoured to show, beautifully marks the inferiority of the latter over the former blessing. That addressed to Jacob was signalized by a remarkable feature of distinction over that addressed to Esau, besides the superior advantages predicted to the former—those persons being declared blessed who should bless him, and those cursed who should curse him. This is altogether omitted in the benediction delivered by Isaac upon his eldest son.

It is clear that from the earliest times it has been the practice to pronounce blessings and curses, according as circumstances may invite the one or provoke the other; of which some very curious things, especially with reference to uttering maledictions upon hostile cities and armies, are related by Macrobius, a Latin writer of the fifth century, in his *Saturnalia*, a work of much learning, and containing many profound reflections upon some of the now obsolete customs of antiquity. In no age of civilized humanity has any thing, perhaps, been more deeply dreaded than the parental curse, which is even now often considered the most terrible of calamities. Of the bitterness of such a curse, Shakspeare conveys a most vivid and painful impression in that vehement malediction imprecated by King Lear upon his ungrateful daughter:—

Hear, Nature, hear;
Dear goddess, hear! suspend thy purpose, if
Thou didst intend to make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!

in her the organs of increase;
 her derogate body never spring
 honour her! If she must teem,
 old of spleen; that it may live
 disnatured torment to her!
 dles on her brow of youth,
 et channels in her cheeks:
 vains and benefits
 t,—that she may feel
 t's tooth it is

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 ble to the demands of their
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 assume, to satisfy all reasonable
 er the extraordinary revolutions of
 ay, and the dispersion of that people into
 erent colonies, it is not surprising that no
 monuments of the poetical records of our ances-
 tors should remain. Scandinavia and Iceland
 have been more fortunate in this respect: there
 the records of their most ancient transactions
 are traditionally preserved to this day. These
 instances of a practice so agreeable to that of
 the Hebrews, existing among a people so re-
 mote, serve to prove the great similarity in the
 human mind throughout all the countries of the
 globe, and show that the most natural and early
 mode of preserving facts has been by verses,
 committed to memory, rather than by written
 documents. What Pocock relates of the Arabs,
 applies perhaps more directly to the present
 subject. 'It seems,' he says, 'to be entirely
 owing to their poetry, that so copious a language
 is preserved in a perfect state. Among other
 commendations of their poetry, they enumerate

this, that both the purity of the Arabic language, and the propriety and elegance of their pronunciation, have owed their preservation entirely to it. Ebn Phares observes, that the Arabic poems serve in the place of commentaries, or annals, in which are recorded the series of their genealogies, and all the facts of history deserving of remembrance, and from which a knowledge of the language is to be collected.' ”

CHAPTER X.

Inspiration only extended to the subject of revelation, not to the vehicle through which that revelation was communicated. The inspiration of the Bible, therefore, not to be found in its language, but in the events which it records, the doctrines which it teaches, the precepts which it contains, the prophecies which it promulgates. Social condition of the patriarchal ages not congenial to the cultivation and expansion of genius. The Hebrew writers, nevertheless, men of the highest mental endowments. Their improvement as they united into political combinations and advanced in the science of government.

OF the precise character of Isaac's prophecies respecting his sons, Bishop Lowth says, in his fourth Prælection,—“The inspired benedictions of the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, are altogether of the same kind (that is, metrical) and the great importance of these prophecies, not only to the destiny of the people of Israel, but likewise of that of the whole human race, renders it highly probable that they were extant in this form before the time of Moses; and that they were afterwards committed to writing by the inspired historian, exactly as he had received them from his ancestors, without presuming to bestow, on those sacred oracles, any adventitious ornaments, or poetical colouring.” This

view is fully concurred in by the learned German professor, quoted at the conclusion of the last chapter.

If then we consider the extreme antiquity of these fragments, so long anterior to the time of Moses who has recorded them, we may well wonder at their extraordinary poetical merit, apart from their manifest inspiration: for although in those prophecies was displayed the brightest effulgence of that inspiration, the vehicles, or words in which the divine revelations were conveyed, were manifestly the compositions of man, since the style of the predictions, throughout the Bible, is as different as the characters of the persons who delivered them; as will be sufficiently obvious in the prophecies of Isaac, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, to mention no others. It was not at all necessary that the Almighty should dictate the very words in which his sacred communications were to be made to mankind, through the mouths of his accredited ministers, when those ministers were evidently endowed with the highest order of intellect, and were, no doubt, chosen on that account, being men of irreproachable lives, and, with capacities greatly enlarged by communication with the eternal fountain of wisdom, capable of embodying, in the most eloquent and sublime language, those events in futurity, which the Almighty had, by a divine and infallible afflatus fixed upon their minds. They were not taught to deliver their inspirations in terms with which those to whom they addressed themselves were not familiar.

There was nothing superhuman in the mere vehicle, but only in the communications, the former being simply human, the latter altogether divine. These prophets spoke the language of men, and God allowed them to declare in their own words, the revelations vouchsafed to them—"those good things to come," which "pass man's understanding." Through those inspired sages, the God of mercy repeatedly forewarned mankind of the judgments about to fall upon them, or of the blessings which would inevitably accrue from unrighteousness of life.

The inspiration of the Bible, consequently, is not to be found in its language—for though this possesses all the beauty of the sublimest eloquence, it is human nevertheless—but in the events which it records, the doctrines which it inculcates, the predictions which it proclaims, the spiritual wisdom with which it is filled. There is nothing in its mere language, beautiful as this is, which requires us to suppose it exclusively an emanation from the divine mind. In short, the several portions of scripture which are by different hands, derive a certain tone and colouring, characteristic of those individual minds which produced them; they exhibit specific peculiarities, and how is this to be accounted for, but upon the broad fact of the language being the spontaneous supply of those minds to whom the divine revelations, designed for man's benefit, were promulgated, and which they clothed in the most apt and eloquent expressions that their genius was

capable of suggesting. The language of scripture is undoubtedly the composition of men, the matter the revelation of God.

Although the prophecies delivered by the immediate "seed of Abraham" to his two sons are far exceeded in the graces of poetical adornment by many compositions in the Bible, especially by parts of Job and Isaiah, which rise to a height of sublimity immeasurably above any thing produced out of the Hebrew writings, those very important predictions exhibit nevertheless, as I trust has been sufficiently shown, the genuine features of poetry, and that too of a very high order.

We find in the patriarchal ages, when the common intercourse among men scarcely extended beyond their own families, and human society therefore was divided into an infinite number of small communities, that their lives were necessarily simple, and that they only turned their attention to those arts requisite to procure for them the ordinary conveniencies and supports of life. They did not think of cultivating their intellects beyond what such a condition of existence required. The earth gave its increase as a reward for their unweary toil, their flocks and herds brought forth abundantly, and they had no positive wants which were extraneous to the simple requirements of nature. They had no supervacaneous cares, because their desires were few and readily satisfied. In such a state of primitive simplicity there was no stimulus to the exercise and displays of genius, consequently its noble resources were seldom

brought into activity, and when they were it was, of course, with abated influence. But no sooner had the descendants of the early races multiplied into a mighty nation, living under an established form of government, regulated by laws and by all the complex machinery of political science, than the mind naturally spurned at the indolence of inaction and rose out of the lethargy imposed, as in the patriarchal times, by an unvarying tenour of circumstances, to the full dignity of its power, excited by that constant and stirring emulation which must invariably operate where men largely meet in the perpetual conflict of opinion upon the best modes of civil and social welfare. Thus we find that even under Moses, and during every subsequent period of their history, the Jews showed themselves to be the greatest people upon earth, intellectually, politically, and morally, until, "when the fulness of time was come," they lapsed from their proud eminence, as it had been so signally foretold of them, and passed, after their decadency from generation to generation, out of the homes of their fathers to the land of strangers, having long become the scorn of almost every country whither they have flown for refuge. During the effulgence of their national glory, we perceive, by the recorded efforts of their genius in the Sacred Volume, that some among them were men of the highest mental endowments, and that their compositions, contained in that inspired book, transcend the noblest efforts of the human intellect found elsewhere.

We are not to imagine that because some portions of scripture poetry are much inferior to others, for it is abundantly clear that the genius of the sacred writers varied greatly in power, as may be seen by comparing Isaiah with Malachi, they are on that account less deserving of our regard; for often, even though less eloquent or sublime, they make ample amends by the importance of their subject.

"It is certain," says Bishop Jebb,* "that the proper characteristic of Hebrew poetry is not elation, grandeur, or sublimity, either of thought or diction. In these qualities, indeed, a large portion of the poetical scriptures is not only distinguished, but unrivalled; yet there are also many compositions of the Old Testament indisputably poetical, which, in thought and expression, do not rise above the ordinary tone of just and clear conception, calmly yet pointedly delivered."

"There are passages," writes Bishop Lowth, "and those not inelegant, which possess little more of the characteristics of poetry than the versification, and that terseness and adaptation of the sentences which constitutes so important a part even of the harmony of verse. This is manifest in most of the didactic psalms, as well as in some others, the matter, order, diction, and thoughts of which are clearly historical, but the conformation of the sentences wholly poetical."†

There appears to me something very like a contradiction in the affirmation of Bishop Jebb,

* Sacred Literature, pp. 4, 5. † Fourth Prælection.

that “ elation, grandeur, or sublimity, either of thought or of diction, are not the proper characteristics of Hebrew poetry,” and yet that “ *a large portion* of the poetical scriptures is not only distinguished, but unrivalled in these qualities;”—that is, that the poetical scriptures are unrivalled in qualities which, although constituting the characteristics of the highest order of poetry, are nevertheless not those of Hebrew poetry; and yet that a large proportion of the only Hebrew poetry known, is not only distinguished by, but unrivalled in those qualities. If *a large portion* is distinguished by “ elation, grandeur, and sublimity,” it is difficult to conceive why these qualities should be discarded from among the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. The fact is, I believe, the noblest characteristics of poetry, mentioned by Bishop Jebb, are, in their most enlarged sense, the especial properties of Hebrew poetry, notwithstanding that “ many compositions of the Old Testament, indisputably poetical, do not rise in thought and expression above the ordinary tone of just and clear conceptions, calmly yet pointedly delivered.”

“ Thus far at least is certain,” says the eloquent Lowth,* “ that poetry has been nurtured in those sacred places where she seems to have been first called into existence; and that her original occupation was in the temple and at the altar. However ages and nations may have differed in their religious sentiments

and opinions, in this at least we find them all agreed, that the mysteries of their devotion were celebrated in verse.* Of this origin poetry even yet exhibits no obscure indications, since she ever embraces a divine and sacred subject with a kind of filial tenderness and affection. To the sacred haunts of religion she delights to resort as to her native soil: there she most willingly inhabits, and there she flourishes in all her pristine beauty and vigour."

I have already dwelt sufficiently long on the poetical beauties of the benedictions pronounced by Isaac upon his two sons; I shall, however, add a very sensible extract from Dr. Adam Clarke's notes at the conclusion of the chapter in which these remarkable prophecies occur.

"The facts to which they refer may be summed up in few words. First; the descendants of Jacob were peculiarly favoured of God. Secondly; they generally had the dominion, and were ever reputed superior in every respect to the Edomites. Thirdly; the Edomites were generally tributary to the Israelites. Fourthly; they often revolted, and sometimes succeeded so far in their revolts as to become an independent people. Fifthly; the Jews were never subjected to the Edomites. Sixthly; as in the case between Esau and Jacob, who after long enmity were reconciled, so were the Edomites and the Jews, and at length they became one

* The most ancient poetry, as well as music, according to Plato, was "that which was addressed to the Deity under the appellation of hymns."—*De Leg. Lib. iii.*

people. Seventhly; the Edomites, as a nation, are now totally extinct, and the Jews still continue as a distinct people from all the inhabitants of the earth. So exactly have all the words of God, which he has spoken by his prophets, been fulfilled!

“On the blessings pronounced upon Jacob and Esau, these questions may naturally be asked. First; was there any thing in these blessings of such a spiritual nature as to effect the eternal interests of either? Certainly not, at least so far as might absolutely involve the salvation of the one or the perdition of the other. Secondly; was not the blessing pronounced on Esau as good as that pronounced upon Jacob, the mere temporary lordship and being the progenitor of the Messiah excepted? So it evidently appears. Thirdly; if the blessings had referred to their eternal states, had not Esau as fair a prospect of endless glory as his unfeeling brother? Justice and Mercy both say, yes! The truth is, it was their posterity, and not themselves, who were the objects of those blessings. Jacob, personally, gained no benefit; Esau, personally, sustained no loss.”

The incarnation of the Godhead for the redemption of man, being the subject of some of the sublimest portions of the Sacred Scriptures, in which allusions are constantly made to it directly and incidentally, I shall offer no apology for concluding this chapter with Milton's beautiful lines, in the fourth book of his *Paradise Regained*, upon that august

Being so benevolently human and so infinitely divine :—

True image of the Father, whether throned
 In the bosom of bliss, and light of light
 Conceiving ; or, remote from heaven, enshrined
 In fleshly tabernacle and human form,
 Wand'ring the wilderness ; whatever place,
 Habit, or state, or motion, still expressing
 The Son of God, with Godlike force endued,
 Against the attempter of thy Father's throne
 And thief of Paradise ! him long of old
 Thou didst debar, and down from heaven cast
 With all his army : now thou hast avenged
 Supplanted Adam, and, by vanquishing
 Temptation, hast regained lost Paradise,
 And frustrated the conquest fraudulent.
 He never more henceforth will dare set foot
 In Paradise to tempt ; his snares are broke ;
 For though that seat of earthly bliss he failed,
 A fairer Paradise is founded now
 For Adam and his chosen sons, whom thou,
 A Saviour, art come down to re-install,
 Where they shall dwell secure, when time shall be,
 Of Tempter and temptation without fear.
 But thou, infernal Serpent ! shalt not long
 Rule in the clouds ; like an autumnal star,
 Or lightning, thou shalt fall from heaven, trod down
 Under his feet : for proof, ere this thou feel'st
 Thy wound—yet not thy last and deadliest wound—
 By this repulse received, and hold'st in hell
 No triumph : in all her gates Abaddon rues
 Thy bold attempt. Hereafter learn with awe
 To dread the Son of God : he, all unarmed,
 Shall chase thee with the terror of his voice
 From thy demoniac holds—possession foul—
 Thee and thy legions ; yelling they shall fly,
 And beg to hide them in a herd of swine,
 Lest he command them down into the deep,
 Bound and to torment sent before their time.
 Hail, Son of the Most High ! heir of both worlds !
 Queller of Satan ! On thy glorious work
 Now enter, and begin to save mankind.

CHAPTER XI.

Jacob's benedictions on his sons. On Reuben. Exposition and analysis, critical and poetical.

WE come now to the blessings pronounced by the patriarch Jacob upon his sons, immediately before his death. The chapter* in which these blessings occur, to the twenty-eighth verse, contains a succession of most important predictions relative to the future condition of the twelve tribes. These predictions were signally fulfilled in the progress of ages, and their gradual accomplishment has rendered intelligible the language of the prophecies, which else would have been utterly inscrutable. Notwithstanding, however, their extreme obscurity in some parts, they are full of the noblest poetical embellishment, as I hope to make appear. There is a grandeur, a massive force, a sublime eloquence, pervading the whole series we are about to examine, that elevates them to the first rank of poetical inspirations, in which human genius is vastly enhanced by those divine communications that at once exalt the spirit, refine the understanding, and purify the heart. There can be no doubt that the divine afflatus had the effect of developing those in-

* Genesis xlix.

tellectual powers, which would never probably have been in any prominent degree manifested but for its operation. Many bright and beautiful things would have been thus lost to the world, which, apart from their inspiration, are calculated to provide for the man of taste so much exquisite literary enjoyment, in addition to that spiritual edification which they were especially designed to convey.

We shall see, as we proceed, that these ancient compositions are unrivalled as displaying the highest attributes of poetry. They abound in strong metaphors, bold images, abrupt transitions, startling figures, and other peculiarities, which place them entirely out of the pale of prose. The first four lines, which form a sort of preface to the subsequent prophecies, are eminently expressive, exhibiting the usual gradational parallelism, of which they present a favourable specimen, gradually rising in fervour, of glowing tenderness and eloquent declamation. The whole series of predictions commences with an affectionate appeal by Jacob to his sons to assemble in a meeting of brotherly love, and come before him that he may bestow his benedictions upon them.

Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you
That which shall befall you in the last days:
Gather yourselves together and hear, ye sons of Jacob,
And hearken unto Israel, your father!

In the two latter verses the gradational parallelism is observable. "Hear" and "hearken" are the first pair of parallel terms, and the re-

petition, if it have no other effect, considerably heightens the euphony of the sentence; but it does more than this, it vastly strengthens the sense, which is positively advanced in force by this reciprocal duplication of the phrases. "Hear" signifies simply to listen, but "hearken" implies the superlative of the same act—that is, to listen with deep attention.

The next pair of parallels, immediately following the first pair, are, "ye sons of Jacob" and "Israel, your father." It will be perceived that the venerable man does not merely bid his sons attend to what he is about to say, but throws additional impressiveness into the command by what succeeds—"hearken unto Israel, *your father*." As if he had said 'hearken unto him whom God has especially favoured (which the name Israel implies), and who is your earthly parent.' The concluding word "father," being the natural correlative to "sons," in the preceding clause, is placed in immediate opposition to it in that which follows, and thus communicates a tone of natural tenderness to this simple but affecting exordium. The latter half of the third line and the whole of the fourth, are so similar in point of construction as to impart, even in our common version, where it was evidently not designed, but arises solely from the arrangement of the Hebrew phrases, a harmony of cadence so nearly allied to verse as almost to beguile the ear into the illusion of a perfect metrical arrangement. The reader will observe how the terms correspond in emphasis, as marked thus:—

*And hear, ye sons of Jacob,
And hearken unto Israel, your father!*

I need scarcely point out further that the construction in both these clauses is precisely similar, there being three emphatic words in each clause, which have an exact correspondency of emphasis. The only difference exists in the emphatic words in the latter clause having more syllables than those in the former, nevertheless, the rhythm in each clause is almost exactly correspondent. Herder has some interesting remarks upon these benedictions, which are well worthy of attention.* “When Jacob predicted to his sons their destiny, he scarcely conceived that they must conquer with the edge of the sword the land which he had promised them. He had quietly traversed it, and looked upon it as his father-land, where even in death his bones longed to find rest. This he divided to his sons, according to the traits of their several characters, as a land for herdsmen. Of a bloody conquest no trace of a conception is found in his benediction. He looked with horror upon the deed of Simeon and Levi in destroying a Canaanitish town and family, who yet had insulted his race. He probably supposed that his sons would soon range over the country again, and establish themselves here and there, as he had pointed out to them. But it was destined to be otherwise. Four hundred years the nation lingered in Egypt, and had no national leader. It sank under

* See *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, vol. ii. pp. 138—141.

oppression, till finally, awakened by distress, it received a deliverer, whom yet it followed with difficulty. What hinderances did he find in his way? In Canaan itself every thing was changed. Immediately on his going out from Egypt, the hordes of Amalek went forth to meet and oppose him; no people would willingly yield him a passage; and with arms in his hands he must open a way for his host. That Moses did this unwillingly, we see from the whole account of his march. He chose not the shortest and most direct routes to Canaan, because he must have forced his passage through a nation of Egyptian origin, and he was chiefly careful for the safe return of his unwarlike followers. Through some kindred nation, as the Edomites, he supposed that he might pass, and gave assurances against the slightest injury. All was to no purpose; and so his people must first wander for thirty years in the desert, the aged die, and the young be formed into a warlike race in the best manner that circumstances permitted. For one thing was certain, that among the inhabitants of Canaan the Israelites could not live, in conformity with the law of Moses. Those nations were warlike hordes, and Israel was to be a peaceful, agricultural people. A part of the inhabitants of the country were troglodytes, dwellers in caves, and we know how debased and hateful these were in the eyes of the Nomadic tribes:—

The sons of base men, nameless children,
Who should be driven from the land—

says Job* and Moses.† They must be expelled from the country, on account of their savage mode of life, the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, and other vices which prevailed among them. The Hamitish superstition, however, was the blackest of all, for human sacrifices existed among them, and how could this consist with the Mosaic economy and political constitution? Only one mode too remained of attaining the end, the sad but common right of war, as it existed in those times. They must leave the country, or be destroyed. That Moses felt the severity of this measure as deeply as we feel it, we see from the mild laws of war which he prescribed to the Israelites for after times.‡ He commanded even to spare the trees in a country made the seat of war. This too was now a war of sad necessity, or as it was called ‘a war of Jehovah,’ that is, an expedition, to which they were constrained by a regard to the land of their fathers, their religion, the graves and primeval claims of their ancestors. What holy war of modern times would bear a comparison with it? And yet how fearfully has this expedition, in the name of Jehovah, for ancient possessions and ancestral rights, been abused. Israel fought *pro aris et focis patrum*, for from this country they came, and here lay the bones of their progenitors. There was many a grove and altar sacred to the God of their fathers; every thing which among ancient nations was de-

* Job xxx. 1—8.

† Lev. xviii. 24—30. Num. xviii. 23, 29, 34. Deut. ii. 10—12, ix. 2.
Wisdom of Solomon xii. 3—6.

‡ Deut. xx.

nominated the family sanctuary, was to be sought there. The nation, moreover, could not remain in the desert. In the short space of forty years, six hundred thousand had died, and they were not formed to live like the predatory hordes of the Ishmaelites. A race of shepherds must have a place of rest, and where should they go, if not to their own father-land? This is the hereditary right of all dwellers in tents among the orientals. They feed their flocks where their fathers fed them, and their flocks themselves know the way to their places of resort. It is strange that we should seek to justify a people so ancient and diverse from us in their notions of life, and of the rights and relations of their tribes, by our notions of property, or to judge them by our most modern international laws, of both which they were wholly ignorant. The testaments and transmitted rights of their ancestors were not recorded in written formularies, but preserved in traditions, in songs, in benedictions, and for these they contended as for their most sacred possessions, as for the honour of God, and of their race. Instead of juridical formularies, let us now examine a poetical title of gift and inheritance, which we have reserved for this connection. It is the blessing of Jacob, who had, as it were, a map of Canaan before him, and distributed the country to his children as his property. We shall notice how he places the tribes, and represents their entering upon their inheritance, and afterwards, by way of contrast, treat of the blessing of Moses; as, apart from

that consideration, this would not be the place for doing so."

I now pass to the first prediction on Reuben and his posterity:—

Reuben, thou art my first-born,
My might and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.
Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,
Because thou wentest up to thy father's bed ;
Then defiledst thou it :—he went up to my couch.

In the first triplet there is uncommon dignity and masculine force of expression. It rises with gradual solemnity, and closes with a majestic climax, terminating like a musical diapason, with a fulness of rich and sonorous harmony.

Thou art my first-born,—

that is, he in whom all the rights of primogeniture have been vested ; one greatly privileged above all thy brethren, among whom thou hast the chief authority ; consequently, in thee my highest expectations were centered. Thou art moreover,—

My might and the beginning of my strength.

When I begat thee I was in the vigorous spring-time of my manhood. I had reached that season of youthful maturity when all my faculties, both of mind and body, were opening into rich and healthy luxuriance. Under these circumstances, I might have expected a son who should have gladdened my prime of life, and have been the glory of my declining years. Thou wast—

The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power;—

the privileges and immunities of the first-born being thine by divine right. Thou hadst the preeminence among thy brethren; but all these blessings have been forfeited by thy folly.

The words—

My might and the beginning of my strength,

are susceptible of a different interpretation from that given above; they may signify—‘thou art the chief of my strength,’ which was comprised in Jacob’s numerous family, the several members of which were to be so eminently distinguished among the nations, and to become a mighty people chosen of God, and from a branch of whom the Messiah was to spring; ‘exalted to

The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.’

There is extraordinary magnitude of sense, so to speak, in the sententious brevity of this line. The word “dignity” may be applied to the spiritual, and “power” to the temporal, supremacy, both of which descended by natural inheritance to the first-born. This latter clause, therefore, conveys in words, few indeed, but vastly significative, the great dignities inherited by Reuben, combining in his own person the authority of ruler and high-priest, which were the especial and acknowledged entails of birth-right.

Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.

The patriarch here compares his son to “un-
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stable" water—that is, to water when, under certain conditions, it defies all control, and becomes obedient to no fixed laws, save those which govern the universe. We may therefore suppose Reuben to be likened to an impetuous stream, which does not flow in its ordinary channel, but, having escaped the embankments by which it was confined, rushes over a precipice or broken declivity in a diverted and tumultuous torrent, deluging the earth in its progress and causing great devastation: then retiring within its original bed, though still unsettled and full of impetuosity to the last, whenever its course is impeded, or when it is lashed into violence by any extraneous or assisting force: one while subsiding into comparative repose, at another swelled into turbulence by the sudden accession of contingent streams, which prodigiously augment its powers of destruction. Such was Reuben, intemperate, rash, headstrong, violent, readily roused by the strong impulses of passion, under no self-control, but reckless, dissolute, and "unstable." "It may be feared that notwithstanding Reuben in the case of Joseph (Genesis xxxvii. 22) showed some compassion, yet that there wanted not other base actions of his to stir up his father's high displeasure."*

In order to see the justness and poetical beauty of Jacob's comparison, now considered, we shall recollect that water is never fixed, but always flowing, sometimes swelling to an inundation, at other times gliding smoothly and

* See Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, by Taylor, fragment 184.

gently onwards. Such were the desires of Reuben, constantly wavering and unsettled; now tumultuous, now placable, but ever disposed to commotion. The comparison is extremely significant, presenting to the mind at once a vivid and pregnant image.

“By similitudes drawn from the visible parts of nature,” says Addison,* “a truth in the understanding is, as it were, reflected by the imagination; we are able to see something like colour and shape in a notion, and to discover a scheme of thoughts traced out upon matter. And here the mind receives a great deal of satisfaction, and has two of its faculties gratified at the same time, while the fancy is busy in copying after the understanding, and transcribing ideas out of the intellectual world into the material. It is this talent of affecting the imagination that gives an embellishment to good sense and makes one man’s compositions more agreeable than another’s. It has something in it like creation, and bestows a kind of existence. It makes additions to nature, and gives greater variety to God’s works. In a word, it is able to beautify and adorn the most illustrious scenes of the universe, and fill the mind with more glorious shows and apparitions than can be found in any part of it.”

In no writings do we find “similitudes drawn from nature” more beautifully and effectively applied than in the Hebrew scriptures, of which the comparison of Reuben’s instability to water

* Spectator, No. 421.

is no unfavourable example. Herder translates the passage thus:—

Thy precedent dignity and excelling power
 Pass by thee as the proud waves—
 Thou hast precedence no more.

This rendering is simply elegant; it wants the vast comprehensiveness of signification—the condensed but vigorous expression and emphatic energy of our version. There is nothing new or particularly striking in the comparison as employed by Herder, though it must be admitted that the image is appropriate and impressive. Still, how does this reading cut down the numerous ramifications of thought growing out of the image, as it appears in the rendering of our venerable translators, and evolving tints of colouring, like prismatic hues drawn from the earth when the sun forces it to exhale that moisture with which the pure dews of night have loaded it. “Passing like the proud waves,” comprehends only a single idea, and that sufficiently common; “unstable as water,” suggests a complex train of thoughts, and these not being reduced to a definite shape, raise at once to the imagination the multifarious and extraordinary qualities which belong to that vast and uncontrollable element. The former, as I have said, is simply an elegant image, the latter a sublime one.

Thou shalt not excel.

This portion of the prophecy was abundantly fulfilled in Reuben’s posterity, which never rose

to eminence as a tribe. They were few in number, and among the first descendants of Jacob who were made captive. In numerical and temporal power, as well as in civil distinction, they were inferior to most of the other tribes, though descended from the first-born, and were distinguished for no peculiar excellence, either political or social; on the contrary, some of those whose lives were signalized by the visitation of divine vengeance, were of this tribe, for instance, Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron, and were swallowed up by an earthquake.

Because thou wentest up to thy father's bed.

At one end of each apartment, according to Dr. Shaw, there is a little gallery raised four or five feet above the floor, with a balustrade in front of it. Here the orientals place their beds, and this was no doubt the case in Jacob's time, as the situation is frequently alluded to in scripture.*

He went up to my couch.

It will be observed here, that there is an abrupt transition from the second to the third person, which gives a sort of dramatic effect to the passage, and considerably heightens its solemnity. The patriarch's horror at his son's guilt is so great, that he seems to be reluctant to utter the particulars of it; but though he only expresses himself in general terms, the

* Genesis xlix. 4. 2 Kings i. 6, 16. Psalm cxxxii. 3.

very character of those terms, and the manner in which they are disposed, evince an unusual, though suppressed mental disturbance ;— something was evidently crossing his thoughts, which he did not choose to trust his tongue to utter. So soon, therefore, as he had finished the accusation, without expressing any particulars, these being too vile to be proclaimed, Jacob suddenly breaks off from addressing his guilty son, as if the charge were too heavy to be reiterated, though he could not banish it from his own recollection ; then, probably subduing his tone, and diverting his thoughts from Reuben's guilt to his own wrong, he adds, excited to sudden and uncontrollable emotion by that wrong, as if speaking to himself,—

He went up to my couch,—

that is, he, my first born, in whom my fondest hopes were centered, destroyed them by an act of incest which has degraded him, and rendered me miserable. Alas ! that he of all others, my heir, should be guilty of such an act of atrocity ! thus provoking a malediction upon his posterity, and entailing evil upon them to the end of time.

Nothing can well stronger show the intensity of Jacob's feelings, than the whole of this remarkable passage. There is, indeed, no anger expressed, but deep and abiding emotion, which is rather thrown off from the sentences, like rays of light reflected from the surface of a mirror, than definitely represented by the words ; these convey much more to the imagination than they actually express, a quality in which some

of the Hebrew writers were eminently gifted, amplifying those signs by which their ideas were determined, by an almost mystical process of expression peculiarly their own.

Durell has some very just observations upon this prophecy. "In the two first lines," observes that judicious commentator, "Jacob dwells on the circumstance of Reuben's primogeniture, and by the affectionate manner in which he expresses himself, seems to be concerned, that his eldest son was to reap no advantage from it. In the next, by opposing his great insolence to his great dignity, he insinuates that the one proceeded from the other; and after having touched upon his crime in general in the fourth, he declares that he should in nowise be eminent among his brethren, and that because he had incestuously defiled his father's bed." This is the reason given, and it is, in truth, a very satisfactory one, for Reuben's loss of those privileges, which his birth would otherwise have entitled him to.

The poetical beauties of this passage need hardly be insisted on, as they are obvious to the most superficial scrutiny. They consist rather in picturesque expressions, bold figures and appropriate phrases, than in those artifices of construction for which the authors of the Old Testament are generally distinguished, though in the last couplet there is an imperfect parallelism, which shows that the patriarch was no stranger to those resources of the poetic art, which, after his time, were carried out into a great variety of forms by his successors.

CHAPTER XII.

The benediction on Simeon and Levi.

JACOB's second benediction is as follows:—

Simeon and Levi are brethren :
Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.
O my soul, come not thou into their secret ;
Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united :
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they digged down a wall.
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce,
And their wrath, for it was cruel :
I will divide them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel.

Nothing can well be further removed from the ordinary structure of prose than the whole of this passage. It is full of inversions and other artifices of poetry, which are managed with consummate propriety and skill. Notwithstanding the obscurity of the first six lines, the felicitous variety of expression and the graceful disposition of the parallelisms can scarcely fail to strike the most indifferent observer. In the concluding quatrain, how perceptibly the subject rises in strength of development,—“*their anger* for it was *fierce*, *their wrath* for it was *cruel*.” “Anger” and “wrath,” “fierce” and “cruel,” advance in force one upon the other,

by a nice but perceptible gradation. Wrath expresses the excess of anger, and cruelty the extreme of fierceness.

I will divide them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel.

“Scatter” and “divide” are of the same character with the emphatic words of the preceding distich, they gradually rise in strength. I will first divide and then scatter them—that is, I will separate them from each other and scatter them among the tribes. Jacob here declares in his own person that he will do what will at a future time come to pass under the dispensation of Almighty God: but he merely delivers the divine determination, and speaks as one inspired to pronounce it. Jacob and Israel, in the concluding couplet, signify Canaan and those countries which were eventually to be divided among his sons. This prophecy was literally fulfilled in the descendants of the two patriarchs named in it, for the tribe of Levi had no other inheritance than forty-eight cities in different parts of Canaan; and after the tribe of Simeon had entered the promised land, so insignificant was their portion that, finding it too small for their increasing families, they formed settlements in those districts which they had conquered from the Idumeans and Amalekites.*

Herder’s version of this benediction is graceful, and it certainly marks the parallelisms more distinctly than our authorized translation:—

* 1 Chron. iv. 39.

Simeon and Levi! they are brethren.
 Their swords were instruments of murder.
 My soul came not into their bloody counsel,
 My heart was not joined in their company.
 When in anger they slew a hero,
 And in revenge destroyed a noble ox.
 Cursed be their revengeful anger,
 Cursed be their cruel hatred;
 I will divide them in Jacob
 And scatter them in Israel.

This rendering has a good deal reduced the obscurity of the passage as given in our Bible, especially in the second couplet; but I think the first couplet is there more beautifully expressed. Herder has certainly succeeded in more distinctly tracing the parallels than our translators have done, making it manifest that the original possesses those artifices of construction peculiar to all metrical compositions. The hemistichs are nearly of the same length, and not only so, but with the exception of the two first pair, there is a consonance which could scarcely be the effect of accident. It is hardly possible to read the German version, which is very literally given by the American translator, without believing it to have been translated from a metrical original.

I shall now proceed to take the prophecy in detail.

Simeon and Levi are brethren.

That is, they are brethren in act and disposition, as well as by generation; "fellows in wickedness," as Mr. Lock styles them. They are persons of the same sanguinary tempers, easily

provoked to violence, headstrong and turbulent, fierce and cruel.

Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.

Those weapons which they have in their houses as means of defence and of security, they have converted into instruments of ruthless barbarity. They have used them with ferocious hostility against the peaceable inhabitants of the land; with them they have accomplished the massacre of a princely family and innocent people, the unsuspecting Hamor and his son, together with the too confiding Shechemites.

What can be a more apt and poetical designation for weapons of war than "instruments of cruelty," especially when employed in the destruction of unresisting victims? It is an expression admirably appropriate. Dr. Adam Clarke, however, after the Septuagint and Samaritan versions, adopts a different reading, namely,—

They have accomplished their fraudulent purposes.

Although this rendering may be less obscure than that of our authorized text, it is unquestionably much less poetical. It, indeed, better characterizes the cunning of these ferocious brothers in their fictitious treaty with the Shechemites, but it by no means leaves so complete an impression upon the mind, of the sanguinary tempers of those vindictive men. There is a want of elevation and amplification of sense in the Samaritan interpretation of the clause, which

is clearly traceable in our common reading; I am, therefore, not disposed to relinquish it, even upon so respectable an authority.

O my soul, come not thou into their secret!

be not privy to their secret designs which are infamous, and consequently not fit for the participation of a righteous soul.

Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united.

"Honour" is here a parallel term with "soul" in the preceding line, and "secret" with "assembly." They are cognate though not synonymous expressions, and this close relation, without an absolute conformity of signification, greatly heightens both the picturesque effect of the phrase and the elevated tone of the sentiment. There is great moral grandeur in this union. The sentence rises in dignity from the commencement to the close. In the first line Jacob declares simply that he never will become a party in the machinations of his degenerate sons, or rather that he never has; for the words, though expressive of the future, evidently refer to the past. In the succeeding line he likewise declares that, in order that his honour may escape the imputation of so base an alliance, he will even shun the place where his sons assemble, that the moral infection of their iniquity may not overtake him.

The employment of the imperative mood with reference to a past transaction renders the passage more emphatic, as well as more poetical,

and these effects are greatly augmented by the abrupt transition from the iniquity of his sons to his own innocence, which at the same time signalizes his detestation of their crime; the apostrophe to his soul and honour adding greatly to the solemn but fervid earnestness of this extremely fine passage. The entire couplet is a noble burst of indignation, and strongly depicts the character of the venerable father, who, entertaining the utmost horror of cruelty, which he abundantly manifested at the time when the unsuspecting Shechemites were so treacherously slaughtered by his two sons Simeon and Levi, spared not the vices of those sons, but with the stern justice of a man who considered his duty to God paramount to all paternal obligations, held them up to perpetual reprobation.

For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they digged down a wall.

They slew the chief of the Shechemites, and in his fate was involved that of the people. They broke into Hamor's palace; then followed the destruction of the city. The words "man" and "wall" appear to be used by way of senecdoche for the entire body of the Shechemites and the whole town, the one being slaughtered, the other destroyed.

For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they digged down a wall.

Here is a fine anticlimax, produced by the inverse gradations of meaning, in the words "anger" and "self-will," "man" and "wall,"

which is judiciously opposed to the climax in the preceding couplet, forming a direct antithesis in the construction of the two pair of hemistichs, which imparts to the whole passage an agreeable, and at the same time an original variety. Dr. Adam Clarke, following Waterland, Durell, and others, renders the latter two lines as follows:—

For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their pleasure they murdered a prince.

This rendering would certainly establish, with more definite precision, the cognate parallelism, but at the expense of the anticlimax, which to my apprehension is, in this place, not only much more graceful and much more appropriate, besides affording a far greater latitude of interpretation, and presenting a fuller description of the event to which those lines refer.

In favour of the above reading, no doubt, much may be plausibly said. I have spoken of its more clearly preserving the parallelism; it may, nevertheless, be remarked, in contradiction to this, that “anger” and “pleasure” do not appear to be parallel terms; still, if we consider that the latter word, taken with the context, in which it is here found, expresses the highest degree of wickedness—a cold-blooded gratification at accomplishing the destruction of a fellow-creature, we must allow that it is any thing but an antithesis to anger, and though not strictly a parallel, it is, at least, a kindred expression, forming a parallelism in the sense, though not in the phrase.

It is true that in this latter reading, the second line being exegetical, or a mere echo of the first, the entire passage is at once rendered perfectly intelligible, and the recourse which, according to the first rendering, must be had to two synecdoches, under the terms "man" and "wall," is altogether obviated; nevertheless, the beauty of the couplet, as it stands in our authorized version of the Hebrew scriptures, is so manifest, and supported too as it is by the Syriac, Arabic, and Chaldee versions, and by many authors of repute, I am unwilling to abandon it, notwithstanding the respectable authorities by which it is supported, as I do not find their arguments sufficiently conclusive to induce me to prefer, according to my own impression, the worse for the better. The first rendering I hold to be the most poetical, the last the least obscure. With which then does the balance of advantage lie? This must necessarily depend upon the balance of opinion. I have recorded mine, but do not presume to decide.

It is true that the reading proposed by Dr. Adam Clarke, upon the sanction of Waterland, Durell, Houbigant, Taylor, and other eminent men, is decidedly a Hebraic construction, and its maintaining in a more obvious form the cognate parallelism, seems to give some colour to its being the true interpretation; nevertheless, the great restriction of the sense would at once lead me, in spite of the parallelism, to reject it for the nobler interpretation given by our translators. The new reading may be thus paraphrased,—‘ they smote a prince and extir-

pated the whole family, together with its chief,' (the prince refers to Shechem, and the chief to Hamor, ruler of the Shechemites,) 'who, together with his whole family, was barbarously slaughtered by Simeon and Levi.' It is certain that our Bible rendering gives a greater amplification of meaning, the first hemistich embracing as much as the entire couplet, according to the interpretation proposed by Dr. Adam Clarke, and the second presenting to the mind a picture of the brothers' ferocity, not at all suggested by his exposition. They not only destroyed Hamor and his family, but slew the citizens and dismantled their city. It will be seen that Herder does not sanction the rendering of our translators. He reads,—

When in their anger they slew a hero,
And in revenge destroyed a noble ox.

On the latter word he has this note. "Ox and man are here synonymous. The parallelism shows this, and we know that even in the poetry of the Greeks, a stately ox was the image employed to represent a brave man." I confess this appears to me by no means a definitive adjustment of the question; for I should be very much disposed to doubt the truth of an interpretation which merely rested upon the existence of a parallelism. The metaphor, though adopted by the Greeks, is any thing but a fine or discriminating one. It is an inversion of the rule of poetic grandeur to compare the greater to the less, the superior to the inferior. There is nothing in the ox but mere brute strength

to which man could with any advantage be compared.

But even admitting the ox to stand as a mere metaphor for a brave man, what is there in sacred history to show that the characters of Hamor and Shechem were such as the learned German would infer from his comparison? I am not aware that they are any where represented as heroes by the sacred writer, and surely they exhibited no heroism in their transactions with the daughter and sons of Jacob; on the contrary, there was much licentiousness and more pusillanimity. Upon the whole, then, I greatly prefer the common reading.

An elegant translation has been given of this benediction in the *Critica Biblica* (vol. i. p. 227.)

Simeon and Levi—brethren!

They completed the iniquity of their stratagems.

O my life, come not thou into their secret!

In their assembly be not one, mine honour!

For in their wrath they slew a man,

Even a prince they cut off in their violence.

Cursed was their wrath, for it was fierce,

And their violence, for it was stubborn!

I will divide them among Jacob,

And disperse them through Israel.

In the third couplet it will be observed that the author reads after Waterland, Durell, and others, against which I have already declared my opinion. In this version, the parallelisms are marked with great distinctness, and the whole artificial conformation is attended to with much exactness. The rendering of the second line is nearly the same as Dr. Adam Clarke's, after the Septuagint and Samaritan copies, which I think

greatly inferior in beauty and force to the reading in our authorized version; nor am I convinced, by the arguments of the learned Wesleyan, that the sense which I prefer is not the true one. In the second couplet, as rendered in the translation just given, a tolerably fair specimen of the epanode may be traced:—

O my life, come not thou into their secret!
In their assembly be not one, mine honour.

Here are two pair of terms, one pair being more important than the other; these, as will be seen in the above example, are so disposed as to bring out the sense in the most impressive manner. The two terms of most importance begin and conclude the couplet, whilst the two less prominent are placed between them, which is the peculiar form of this graceful figure. Had the third couplet been given in its natural form, with a very trifling change in the distribution, an epanode would have been likewise produced; *e. g.*

For a man they slew in their wrath,
In their violence they cut off a prince.

Here again the most emphatic terms begin and end their respective clauses; whereas, by adopting the inversion, as is done by the writer in the *Critica Biblica*, the beauty of the epanode is destroyed.

The following will, I apprehend, be found a sufficiently intelligible paraphrase of the entire passage. “Simeon and Levi might have succeeded to the forfeited rights of primogeniture,

of which Reuben's incest had justly deprived him, had they not proved such instruments of treachery and cowardly cruelty. May my soul be for ever preserved from such sanguinary counsels, and my honour continue unstained by such horrible guilt, for the fierceness of their anger hurried them to break through every obstacle which opposed their terrible revenge. Cursed be their anger, for it was violent in the highest degree, and their vengeance, for it was alike cruel. That savage and inhuman society which they had established for such a barbarous purpose, obliges me to divide their tribes, and, by the spirit of prophecy with which I am endowed, to foretel that their posterities shall be disunited and scattered in Israel."*

* See Dodd's Note.

CHAPTER XIII.

The benediction on Judah.

THE patriarch proceeds in the same strain of prophetic inspiration.

Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise;
Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies:
Thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

Judah is a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up:
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
And as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shileh come,

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be.
Binding his foal unto the vine,
And his ass's colt unto the choice vine;
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes shall be red with wine,
And his teeth white with milk.

Great as are the obscurities of this prophecy, it nevertheless may be truly said to abound with poetical beauties. They cannot escape detection. The language is highly figurative and animated, the metaphors extremely felicitous and forcible, the pictures presented to the mind exceedingly vivid, graphic, and full of vital energy. Every thought is elevated, every expression vigorous, every image significant,

and every sentiment sublime. The chief obscurity of the prediction lies in that portion of it, which directly refers to the coming of God in the flesh—that great Deliverer, promised to our unhappy progenitors in Paradise, immediately after their signal and ungrateful act of disobedience.

The birth of Him that no beginning knew,
 Yet gives beginning to all that are born ;
 And how the Infinite far greater grew
 By growing less ; and how the rising morn
 That shot from heaven, did back to heaven return ;
 The obsequies of Him that could not die,
 And death of life, end of eternity ;
 How worthily He died, that died unworthily,*—

is the prodigious mystery which was the subject of Jewish prophecy, and which Christianity has revealed to us in all the glory of its accomplishment.

The word Shiloh, in the tenth line, is admitted by nearly all commentators of repute, to refer to the Messiah, of whom, therefore, it may be said to be now universally understood.

Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.

Judah signifies praise, and from this the patriarch took occasion to render the very name of his son, as it were prophetic, declaring, that Judah's descendants should be pre-eminently esteemed among the other tribes, as the Messiah was to proceed from them, and not only should they hold a high rank among the Israel-

* Giles Fletcher.

ites in subsequent ages, but likewise be distinguished, on account of such pre-eminence, throughout all generations.

From the name of this patriarch, the entire posterity of Jacob was denominated Jews, and the land to which they succeeded, after having expelled the idolatrous inhabitants, Judæa. The tribe of Judah was thus signalized above all the other tribes, and this distinction they maintained, until the final subversion of the Jewish polity, when the wretched remnant of the true Israelites were scattered over the earth, and the race of Abraham became strangers and wanderers among the nations.

The three eldest sons of Jacob having forfeited their birthright, the first on account of his atrocious incest, the second and third on account of their scarcely less atrocious cruelty, it was transferred to Judah, who thenceforth became distinguished among the tribes, maintaining those exclusive privileges which had lapsed to him, in consequence of the forfeiture of the heads of the three elder branches.

Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies.

In the neck may signify the back or shoulders, and will therefore express that the foes of Judah should be put to flight. As if the prophet had said—‘they shall turn their backs and flee from thee, and thou shalt pursue them.’

Putting the hand in the neck is manifestly nothing more than a figurative expression, importing conquest, or forcing the enemy to turn from their victors and quit the field. It is a very

significant metaphor. The idea conveyed in the line just quoted, is that of a person turning to flee, and his pursuer putting his hand upon his shoulder, to arrest his flight and secure him; thus at once showing his own superiority and the weakness of his enemy. It is a remarkably happy image, expressing subjugation on the one hand, and triumph on the other. The enemies of Judah were finally overthrown and brought into complete subjection under David, who, evidently referring to this prophecy, says, at the fortieth verse of the eighteenth psalm,—

Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies :
That I might destroy them that hate me.

Thy father's children shall bow down before thee,

that is, they shall acknowledge thee as exalted to the highest dignity among them, and entertain towards thee the most profound reverence. This prediction we find afterwards fully confirmed by the inspired Chronicler. "For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler."* In this passage, the cause of Judah's pre-eminence is assigned. Here is clearly a reference to Jacob's prophecy. The coincidence is too remarkable to have been accidental.

Now it will be observed, that in the opening triplet which terminates the first subject of this benediction, the sense rises in beautiful gradation. First, Judah shall be praised, that is, his superior dignity shall be acknowledged, by

* 1 Chron. v. 2.

his brethren. Secondly, he shall put his hand into the neck of his enemies, and bring them into subjection. Thirdly, the whole posterity of his father shall admit his supremacy, the natural consequence of this subjugation of his enemies, and thus, in the poetical phrase of the prediction, "bow down before him." The gradations of sense are nicely discriminated, the different members being maintained with great distinctness, and graduating naturally to the close, which represents the very acme of temporal homage. All the terms employed have marvellous force of signification, imparting extraordinary vigour, as well as a glowing earnestness, to the thoughts. It is altogether a masterpiece of dignified but impassioned eloquence.

The supremacy of the tribe of Judah being declared, the venerable prophet proceeds, under the manifest influence of inspiration, from their temporal distinctions to their warlike character.

Judah is a lion's whelp ;
 From the prey, my son, thou art gone up :
 He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
 And as an old lion ; who shall rouse him up ?

Here again is a masterly climax, and observe how admirably the comparisons are chosen—the same image being so skilfully varied, and yet so suitably employed. Nothing can be grander or more appropriate. Every word is the sign of a thought, and every thought seems expanded into a sentiment. Judah is first compared to a lion's whelp, exhibiting incipient strength and

courage; then to a full-grown lion, in which those qualities are completely developed; and finally, to a lioness nursing her cubs, by far the fiercest and most formidable of the three, her natural qualities of strength and courage being heightened by the constant excitement of apprehended danger to her offspring.

The word rendered "old lion" in our version of the Bible, should have been translated "lioness," according to the general decision of the most enlightened expositors, and this reading the peculiar structure of the passage justifies. It is more consonant to the whole scene represented, and not only so, but exhibits a greater accuracy and more perfect congruity of illustration.

In this metaphorical picture, the infancy, youth, and maturity of the tribe of Judah, are characterized with *précision* and perspicuity, under figurative representations, in a manner truly marvellous. From the first it shall be powerful, but this initial, rather than positive, power, shall only afford promise of what it will be; like a lion's whelp, that only gives indications of those formidable qualities with which it must eventually be endowed. It shall afterwards become a community composed of brave and enterprising members, the terror of its enemies; like a full-grown lion, which all other animals hold in fear, on account of its known might, and indomitable resolution. And finally, as a lioness accompanied by her young becomes in the last degree fierce and intractable, it shall be dreaded by all the surrounding nations.

"Hence," says Dr. Hales, "a lion was the standard of Judah. (Compare Num. ii. 3, Ezek. i. 10.) The city of David, where he reposed himself after his conquests, secure in the terror of his name (1 Chron. xiv. 17), was called Ariel, the lion of God (Isaiah xix. 1), and our Lord himself, his most illustrious descendant, was the lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. v. 5.)" The passages referred to above clearly point to this remarkable prophecy.

From the prey, my son, thou art gone up.

The patriarch keeps up the metaphor of the lion, as if he saw his descendants of the tribe of Judah returning with the spoils of their enemies; "alluding," as Bochart observes, "to lions which, having secured their prey in the plains, return satiated to the mountains." As Judah is compared to a lion, so are his enemies, with great propriety and justness of illustration, compared to a lion's prey. In every part of the similitude there is a correspondence as perfect as it is poetical. Nothing can be chosen with more complete congruity than the images, and if we examine the lines with critical scrutiny, we can hardly fail to be astonished at how much is expressed in so few words. The circumstances are presented to the mind by vivid pictures, not worked out by descriptions, and thus in a single couplet a more complete representation is made than, under the ordinary mode of communication, could be given in several sentences. It is really marvellous how much is signified in every hemis-

tich, and the extreme condensation will be the more readily perceived, by making an intelligible paraphrase of any one passage. This, indeed, is so great, that often, although the sense may be sufficiently comprehensible to a penetrating mind, without some amplification it would not be easy to render the application clear to the general reader, by whom nothing but a very obvious sense can be appreciated; nevertheless, when once the drift of the comparison is perceived, the beauty of the passage must become immediately apparent to the dullest comprehension.

Bishop Lowth, alluding to the first verse of the quatrain,—

Judah is a lion's whelp,

says,* “this metaphor is immediately drawn out into an allegory, with a change of person—

From the prey, my son, thou art gone up—

to the dens of the mountains, understood. In the succeeding sentences the person is again changed, the image is gradually advanced, and the metaphor is joined with a comparison, which is repeated:—

*He stoopeth down, he coucheth as a lion,
And as a lioness; who shall rouse him?”*

This couplet, as here given, is according to Lowth's rendering, which is no doubt just.

* See Tenth Prælection.

Who shall rouse him ? .

That is, who shall dare to excite the indignation of the tribe of Judah, and thus provoke certain punishment? It will be as dangerous to incense this division of the Israelites, as to rouse a nursing lioness, the fiercest and most terrible of animals.

Now comes the most important part of the prophecy. A sudden transition is made from the military to the civil, or rather from the turbulent to the quiescent dominion of Judah. It is, as I have already observed, a passage attended with some difficulty, notwithstanding its evident and universally admitted reference to the Messiah:—

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come,
And unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

In the first line of this quatrain, it is promised that the supreme authority, both civil and ecclesiastical, shall remain in the tribe of Judah, until SHILOH, that is the PEACEMAKER, come. In other words, that the temporal domination should be established in this tribe until the Messiah's coming. The sceptre being the emblem of sovereignty, sufficiently leads to the meaning of the first line, the sceptre being employed, by a common metonymy, to denote that supremacy which the person, who alone has a right to bear this symbol, enjoys.

Nor a lawgiver from between his feet.

This implies that a specific form of government shall be established; that the Sovereign, or Lawgiver, whichever he may happen to be, who shall have the chief rule, shall be from this tribe, or from those who were first called Jews, and that the form of polity once settled, shall continue without any material change until the coming of Christ, who shall supersede the patriarchal dispensation, and prepare the way for the universal establishment of the Christian.

The word Lawgiver has a secondary meaning, implying something inferior in dignity to a Sovereign. We accordingly find, that after the election of a king from the seed of Abraham, the monarchical power did not continue up to the period of our Saviour's birth, but that for a large portion of the intervening time, from the reign of David to that of Herod, the posterity of Jacob was governed by subordinate rulers. David and his descendants held the regal authority until the Babylonish captivity.

According to Josephus,* "they lived under kings from David's time to the captivity, five hundred and thirty-two years: and under governors, after the captivity, much about the same number of years. For there being five hundred eighty and eight years from the captivity to our Saviour's birth, if seventy years be deducted—which was the time their captivity lasted—and ten be added—in which, after the birth of Christ, Herod and his son Archalaus reigned in Judæa, and it was not reduced into

* Ant. book 11, chap. 4.

the form of a province—there were just five hundred and twenty-eight years: that is, the period in which they were under kingly authority and under subordinate governors, was in a manner of the same length. Which makes it the more wonderful, that Jacob should, so many ages before, exactly divide the whole power he foresaw would be in Judah, between them who wielded the sceptre and those who were only subordinate governors.”*

The phrase “from between his feet,” is a Hebraism, alluding to the birth of children, and therefore simply signifies from his posterity: Dr. Adam Clarke consequently reads—

Nor a teacher from his offspring,

which is a simplification of the Hebrew figure, making the sense more evident, though certainly at the expense of the highly metaphorical, but no less significative language of the original.

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be,

imports, that the gentiles and people of all nations shall worship him. Dr. Hales thus sums up this important prediction. “The civil government was not to cease or depart from Judah until the birth or coming of Shiloh, signifying the APOSTLE, as Christ is styled, (Heb. iii. 1.) Nor was the native lawgiver, or expounder of the law, teacher or scribe, intimating their ec-

* See Patrick's Note.

clesiastical polity, to cease, until Shiloh should have a congregation of religious followers attached to him. And how accurately was this fulfilled in both respects."

Herder renders this obscure passage as follows:—

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the commander's staff from his march,
Until he comes to his place of rest,
And nations are obedient to him.

This is, at least, an intelligible exposition, but so contrary to every received interpretation, that most readers will hesitate to receive it upon a single authority, however respectable. Herder says, in vindication of his rendering,—
“How could the patriarchal shepherd be thinking of military standards, while his sons were standing before him as shepherds, and when all the other images possess the corresponding simplicity? Judah's hand is clenched upon the neck of his enemies, he seizes his prey like a lion, he marches forth as a conqueror, and complacently and proudly satiates himself with wine and milk. Such are the images which the picture presents, and how came warlike banners among them? Besides, the parallelism requires rather the sense which I have given. Judah is always to retain the insignia of office, and since the language here relates to a march towards Canaan, or Shiloh, the place of rest, the sense becomes clear. ‘Judah, in his march and pursuit of his enemies, is never to lay down the staff of a commander, till peace is secured, and the nations brought into subjection.’ That the

original word here means not only a commander, but the commander's staff of office, is plain, from Num. xxi. 18, as well as from the parallelism. The word corresponds with 'sceptre,' as "his march" must also with 'Judah.' This again, according to what follows, can only mean the *going*, the *steps*, the *march* of Judah. That the original admits of this sense, and that indeed the name of the foot in Hebrew was derived from its motion, its step, needs no proof."

I do not find the signification offered by Herder proved by his note. In answer to his question—"how could the patriarchal shepherd be thinking of military standards, while his sons were standing before him as shepherds?" a very few words will suffice. Jacob was, at this moment, acting in the capacity of a prophet of God; his benedictions were real inspirations, and as the Deity furnished his thoughts at this solemn moment, there is nothing incongruous in supposing that he should have been thinking of military standards, when it was the divine purpose to put such thoughts into his mind. "All the other images possessing the corresponding simplicity," is no argument against the commonly received interpretation; because abrupt transitions from the simple to the sublime are among the most prominent features of Hebrew poetry, and are frequently traceable in these very predictions, which are singularly remarkable for combining the two opposite qualities of simplicity and grandeur. Besides, I really do not see that the images are more simple in Herder's version than in our received translation, though

it must be allowed that the former is less obscure. That he has rendered the parallelism more obvious is undoubtedly true, but it is not clear to me that any parallelism was intended in the sense, as it is not defined by the commentators generally, who have given their several versions of the passage. Dr. Hales, indeed, considers this an alternate quatrain, exhibiting that artifice of construction, by which the third line forms a continuous sense with the first, and the fourth with the second; thus, as he reads it—

1. The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
3. Nor a scribe of his offspring,
2. Until Shiloh come;
4. And [until] to him a congregation of peoples.

I do not, however, believe that this hyperbation was intended, or it would have been rendered more evident, as is the case universally, where such alternations in a certain series of verses are observed, of which many examples might be quoted; but one example may suffice,—

1. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood,
3. And my sword shall devour flesh:
2. And that with the blood of the slain and of the captives,
4. From the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.

(Deut. xxxii. 42.)

In this last example there is no mistaking the corresponding sequences, but in the first these are at least doubtful.

The word Shiloh being interpreted as a place instead of a person, is opposed to every eminent authority, and I must say that I think the latter part of Herder's note elaborately futile,

altogether failing to establish the point for which he contends. He completely begs the question, by assuming, that Shiloh is synonymous with Canaan, signifying the place of rest, which, were it proved, would at once establish the propriety of his reading; but this point being settled against him by the most learned authorities, I cannot accept his interpretation, though it is, no doubt, ingenious, and has the merit, not at all peculiar to the German commentators generally, of being perfectly intelligible.

Shiloh has been, I may say, with universal consent, applied to Christ; but the word, in our Bibles translated "Lawgiver," is supposed by some to signify, primarily, a staff or ensign of legislative or judicial authority; and the phrase, "from between his feet," alludes to the custom of a judge sitting with a staff of authority between his feet, leaning or resting his hand on the top of it, as sitting in judgment, or attending in a court of justice. (See Dr. Dodd's note.) Herder has evidently been influenced by this view, although his version somewhat extends the latitude of interpretation.

We come now to the concluding portion of this important prophecy, which is poetical in the most extended sense of the word.

Binding his foal unto the vine,
And his ass's colt unto the choice vine;
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.

In the first of these couplets there is a happy

specimen of gradational parallelism, of which I have already pointed out several examples. The two first lines present the same idea, simply expressed in the first hemistich, and somewhat amplified in the second. By the foal, we shall understand a young ass, and by the colt, one still younger; the former fed upon the common vine, the latter upon the choice vine, that of Sorek, which was celebrated throughout the land of Canaan.

Durell has some good remarks upon this fine passage. "Of these four hemistichs," he says, "the second and fourth are exegetical of the first and third, and they all express one general sense, which is somewhat differently exemplified in the first and second couplet. To tie asses in vineyards, and to wash clothes in wine, are generally understood to be hyperbolical phrases, denoting such extraordinary fruitfulness, that grapes would be scarcely less abundant than grass, and wine than water."

I can conceive nothing more expressive of universal fecundity than these couplets. Under the term ass's colt, may be signified the young of asses indiscriminately, as well as their dams, which always accompany them, and these are not only allowed to feed upon the common, but upon the choice vines, the latter being so abundant, that the people inhabiting the country could not consume their produce. It is impossible to conceive a more perfect picture of abundance, than is here presented in two short lines. No details could have so filled the mind, as this one general but comprehensive image.

Of the quality of the grapes, some idea may be formed from those samples brought by the spies, commissioned by Moses to survey the land of Canaan before it was taken possession of by the Israelites,* a single cluster being so large, that it was borne between two men on a staff. Nor need this create much surprise, since, as I am assured, upon authority which I can have no reason to question, that a single bunch of grapes has been produced upon the vine at Hampton Court, weighing upwards of forty pounds. Whether this be really the fact or not, may be easily ascertained by those who doubt it.

He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.

“To attribute eyes, teeth, and clothes,” says Durell, “to a country, might seem a great license, but prosopopœias are so frequent in the prophets, that they need not be cited, to justify Jacob considering Judah under that image, or in the light of his virgin daughter.” I should here state, that Durell reads *her* in both hemistichs, instead of *his*.

It will be seen, that the couplet just quoted is a perfect specimen of synonymous parallelism, which Bishop Jebb denies altogether to exist in the Hebrew scriptures. It cannot be disputed that *garments* and *clothes* are strictly synonymous terms, so likewise are *wine* and the *blood of grapes*, the latter being nothing

* Numbers xiii. 23.

more nor less than the former, though exhibited under a beautiful paraphrase, and at the same time presenting an elegant image. A better idea of profuse plenty could not well be conveyed, than the juice of grapes being so common, as to be used for the purpose of cleansing foul garments. It was saying in other words, as Durell observes, that wine should be as plenty as water; and this hyperbole will appear less extreme, when it is considered that in all hot countries, water is comparatively scarce.

The concluding distich of this benediction is encumbered with some difficulties of explication.

*His eyes shall be red with wine,
And his teeth white with milk.*

This may be a mere oratorical figure, signifying that the descendants of Judah shall inherit so fruitful a country as to enable them to drink wine and milk in such quantities, that their eyes shall assume the sparkling ruby tint of the one, and their teeth the immaculate whiteness of the other. A very slight alteration would present a perfect specimen of constructive parallelism.

*His eyes shall be red with wine,
His teeth shall be white with milk.*

Here the emphatic terms in each line are exactly correspondent, and at the same time most happily opposed.

Eyes are probably used in this passage for the whole countenance, as the original word has sometimes this signification; the entire

couplet, however, is clearly only a poetical picture, as the tying of asses to vines, and washing of garments in the juice of grapes; some commentators adopt the following reading,—

His eyes shall be brighter than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk.

The changes here proposed undoubtedly simplify the sense, and reduce the hyperbole in both lines, but I do not think, nevertheless, that much is gained by this alteration; it is only an abatement of the figurative exaggeration so common to Hebrew poetry, and forming one of its paramount beauties.

Dr. Dodd gives the following paraphrase of this notable prophecy. “Judah, thy name signifies praise, and accordingly thou shalt have the praise of all thy brethren. They shall fall prostrate before thee, as before their king and sovereign, and thy enemies shall be forced to submit their necks to thy yoke. Like a young lion shall my son fall upon his prey; and like an old lion, or as a fierce lioness, ready to rush upon it; who shall dare to rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh, the Messiah, come, and the people be gathered unto him. His portion shall abound with such fertile vineyards, fruitful trees, and pasture grounds, that he shall tie his ass to the vine and palm tree, and wash his garments in the juice of the grape, and his teeth with the milk of his kine.”

To look upon the modern Jews and reflect what they were in the days of their national

prosperity, conveys in truth a melancholy lesson, Their condition, since the decline of their political power, might well excite the beautiful lament of George Herbert, a poet of distinction in the reign of the first James, but now little known.

Poor nation, whose sweet sap and juice
Our scions have purloined and left you dry :
Whose streams we got by the Apostles' sluice
And use in baptism, while ye pine and die ;
Who by not keeping once, became a debtor,
And now, by keeping, lose the letter.

Oh ! that my prayers,—mine alas !
Oh ! that some angel might a trumpet sound :
At which the church, falling upon her face,
Should cry so loud, until the trump were drowned ;
And by that cry of her dear Lord obtain,
That your sweet sap might come again.

CHAPTER XIV.

*The benedictions pronounced upon Zebulun, Issachar,
and Dan.*

I SHALL now pass on to the third blessing of the venerable patriarch:—

Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea ;
And he shall be an haven for ships ;
And his border shall be unto Zidon.

In the division of Canaan, the portion of Zebulun extended from the Mediterranean sea on the west, where there was a haven for ships, to the sea of Tiberias, commonly called the sea of Galilee in the New Testament, on the east. It is here predicted that this tribe shall extend along the sea-coast, where they shall have commodious harbours, and their territories shall reach to the country of Zidon, or Phœnicia. Bishop Patrick states, upon the authority of Bochart, that “ the Zidon mentioned in this passage does not refer to the city of Zidon, for the tribe of Zebulun did not extend itself beyond Mount Carmel, which is at least forty miles from thence, but to the country of Zidon, that is Phœnicia, which the Zebulunites touched.”

The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel gives a very intelligible paraphrase of the passage.

“ Zebulun shall be on the coasts of the sea, and shall rule over the havens; he shall subdue the provinces of the sea with his ships, and his border shall extend unto Sidon.”

“ Had Jacob been present,” says Stackhouse, “ at the division of the land of Canaan, he could hardly have described Zebulun’s lot more exactly than he did, two hundred and fifty years before it was settled. It extended from the Mediterranean sea on the west, to the lake of Genesareth on the east, and was very commodious for trade and navigation. Such particulars as these must have convinced the Israelites that it was not chance, nor power, nor policy, that gave them the land of Canaan, but God’s right hand, and his arm, and the light of his countenance, because he had a favour unto them.”

As the triplet which contains the prediction concerning Zebulun’s posterity, presents nothing very remarkable in a poetical point of view, I shall at once proceed to what follows.

*Issachar is a strong ass,
Couching down between two burdens :
And he saw that rest was good,
And the land that it was pleasant ;
And bowed his shoulder to bear,
And became a servant unto tribute.*

These couplets are eminently poetical, the first more especially. Issachar being principally engaged in husbandry, is fitly compared to a strong ass, a patient drudging animal, capable of undergoing the severest labour, without suffering any diminution of strength

or hardihood; as Judah had been compared to a lion, to denote the courage and resolution of that tribe. It is a particularly apt and expressive comparison, and this singular felicity of illustration is remarkable throughout the Hebrew writings. The figures employed by the sacred authors, though frequently selected from among the commonest objects in nature, are never mean and feeble, but, on the contrary, always elevated and forcible in the extreme.

The peculiar habits of the ass are familiar to all; the drift, therefore, of the comparison can be mistaken by none. The qualities of this animal are patience, gentleness, great capability of endurance, laborious exertion, and a meek submission to authority. As Judah, the forefather of a fierce and warlike community, had been previously compared to the most courageous and ferocious of quadrupeds, so Issachar, the progenitor of a race singularly docile and distinguished for their patient industry, is exhibited under the similitude of the meekest and most laborious. The industrious and pacific character of this latter tribe, together with their robust strength and rustic hardihood, could not have been better represented than under the figure of a strong enduring ass

Couching down between two burdens ;

that is, to an animal, so patient under its load, that it will even lie down with it upon its back. This is a skilful, and at the same time an eloquent, heightening of the comparison, which is

no less original than just, most expressively characterizing, in five emphatic words, the submissive and indolent temper of this portion of Jacob's posterity.

And he saw that rest was good—

that peace was preferable to war—

And the land that it was pleasant.

Of the country inhabited by Issachar's posterity, Josephus says, in his Jewish war,* "it is fruitful to admiration, abounding in pastures and nurseries of all kinds, so that it would make any man in love with husbandry."

It was natural that Issachar, seeing himself in possession of such a productive territory, should prefer the repose of peace to the turbulence of war; the reason, therefore, of this preference, is left to be inferred from the latter line of the couplet. This mode of suggesting an inference is exceedingly happy. The impression made upon the mind, though less direct, is more positive. The suggestion working, as it were, through our own reflections and gradually opening upon the thoughts, until the idea obtains its full development and the whole inference is evolved, receives a charm from this gradual intellectual process of perception, which would be probably missed were the fact more explicitly stated and all stimulus to mental activity withdrawn. It is this pleasing exercise of the intel-

* Book 8, chap. 3.

lect which constitutes one of the most agreeable excitements of poetry.

Simple as the second couplet of this benediction is, it is a masterly specimen of condensation. In two short hemistichs as much is expressed, by inference as well as by words, as would be contained in a dozen lines of ordinary writing, and the mode of expression is far more satisfactory, besides the impression conveyed being more profound. The concluding distich further confirms the patient and submissive character of the descendants of Issachar. They became industrious husbandmen, and submitted to a heavy taxation rather than allow their peace to be disturbed. They were politic rather than cowardly, though not deficient in courage, as is evident from Deborah's song, in which they are extolled for the ready assistance offered by them on that critical occasion:—"The princes of Issachar were with Deborah."* They were evidently, therefore, not recreants, but a race of hardy, prudent agriculturists. Herder gives the following version of this prophecy:—

. Issachar is a strong beast of burthen
That lieth down between two hills.
He seeth that repose is pleasant,
The land around is beautiful,
He stoopeth his shoulder to bear
And serveth the vessels of water.

It may be fairly asked, what is there in the second line of the first couplet characteristic of a beast of burthen? There is no just sequence

* Judges v. 15.

in the sense. The idea of a beast of burthen lying down "between two hills," is a simple one carried into the complex, without receiving the slightest augmentation of force. The animal might have been much more naturally represented as lying down between two hay-stacks, than between two hills, the former representation being much more pertinent to the description. No definite image is conveyed to the mind in the second hemistich, or rather I should say that the object represented by the image is not at all obvious, since it is a comparison without any apparent similitude. Neither is there sufficient grandeur to atone for the obscurity. The translation offered of these two lines by the writer in the *Critica Biblica*, is much more consistent; adopting the reading of the Septuagint, he renders them—

Issachar, desiring good things,
Reposed between the borders.

The last word is likewise translated borders by the Vulgate. In this version, as is sufficiently clear, the highly expressive poetry of the original is converted into very ordinary prose; intelligible and consistent, indeed, but that is all—every spark of poetry is quenched.

"The proper signification of the word *mesh-petim*," says Dodd,* "here rendered burthens, is the divisions in a stall or stable, that is, the bars or boards which divide it into distinct standings. The two bars or rails, according to

* See his Note on the passage.

Taylor, denote the labours of husbandry, and the extraordinary taxes they would submit to, to be exempted from the avocations and perils of war. Others suppose that this refers to the boundaries or limits of the other tribes; Issachar's being an inland settlement, therefore more suited to agriculture. Our translation, 'between two burdens,' agrees well with the context, and fitly marks the tame and indolent temper of this tribe."

The concluding distich, as rendered by Herder, is quite a new reading:—

He stoopeth his shoulder to bear,
And serveth the vessels of water;

which he justifies with much plausibility in the following note. "The language here by no means relates to tribute, for how would that be consistent with the image of a beast of burden, the comparison with which is obviously continued in the representation of bearing upon the shoulder. The word in the original meant, undoubtedly, a bottle or leathern bag, and the notion of tribute came to be denoted from their bringing tribute in bags or sacks. Issachar came to dwell by the Kadumim, small streams and torrents, which were swollen in time of rain; and here, according to his patient nature, he was to divide the water to his brethren, the roving herdsmen, and obtain from it his own advantage. That in this region there were assemblages of herdsmen, for the distribution of water, we see from the song of Deborah."

Here the servitude of Issachar is more defi-

nitely shown, than in the version received among us, for the very character of it is described, but that any allusion is made to the descendants of this patriarch being tributary, is denied by the German expositor; this, however, signifies little, as whether such allusion is made or not, it does not at all affect the general tenor of the prophecy, which remains the same either way.

Now follows the blessing upon Dan:—

Dan shall judge his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.
Dan shall be a serpent by the way—
An adder in the path,
That biteth the horse-heels,
So that his rider shall fall backward.
I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!

Dan being the son of a concubine, and consequently illegitimate, is in this prediction promised equal political privileges with the other tribes, the heads of which were the legitimate offspring of Jacob. It is foretold that the Danites should appoint rulers and judges in their own tribe. Their progenitor is here, like the rest of Jacob's sons, admitted to political authority, and is promised an inheritance among the legitimate sons of his father. His, however, was not to be a distinguished settlement;—his inheritance was to be in a region interspersed with mountains, from the narrow gorges of which he might suddenly fall upon the rear of an enemy's cavalry, and cause the horses to throw their riders, or drag them from their saddles behind. Our translators have given a

clear specimen of constructive parallelism in the first pair of lines of this prediction, each line bearing a singular correspondency in the collocation of the words, the emphatic terms being precisely the same, as to number, in each :—

*Dan shall judge his people
As one of the tribes of Israel.*

Here it will be perceived that there are three emphatic words in both lines, exactly corresponding in position, and imparting a precisely similar rhythm to each clause. The quatrain which follows, though highly figurative, gives a most accurate idea of the character of this tribe. They were distinguished for their cunning in war, resorting to stratagems rather than to open encounters. This is signified by the serpent and the adder, both creatures of acknowledged cunning, always striking their enemies insidiously. The gradational parallelism is strongly marked in the couplet where these reptiles are respectively mentioned:—

*Dan shall be a serpent by the way,
An adder in the path.*

Observe how beautifully the sense rises. First, he shall be a serpent by the wayside, that attacks the passenger from its unsuspected concealment. Secondly, a more venomous reptile, actually concealed in the traveller's path. The word translated adder, in the last line, is a description of venomous snake, called a cerastes, from two horns upon its head. With

these feelers it contrives to catch small birds which venture to approach it. This creature is exceedingly venomous, and often found in ruts upon the roads. Being of a dusty colour, it is not perceived, but biting the horses' legs as they pass, they rear with the sudden pang, and their riders consequently fall backwards. Can any thing more truly characterize the Danites, who were remarkable for defeating their enemies more by policy than by open force, like those reptiles which lie concealed in the inequalities of the highways, and unexpectedly bite the horses' heels, thus causing them to overthrow their riders? The cerastes is "a serpent, so called," says Calmet, "because it has horns on its forehead. This serpent hides itself in the sand, is of a sandy colour, crawls slanting on its side, and seems to hiss when in motion. The word occurs only in Genesis xlix. 17,—

Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A cerastes in the path.

(In the English text rendered adder, in the margin arrow-snake, that is the dart-snake or jaculus.) The Hebrew *shephiphon*, is by some interpreted asp, by others basilisk; but Bochart is of opinion that we should keep it cerastes."

Of this benediction Herder's version is eminently happy:—

Dan also shall be the leader of his tribe,
As one of the tribes of Israel.
A serpent shall Dan be in the way,
A horned serpent in the path,
That biteth the heels of the horse,
So that his rider falleth backward.

This differs nothing in sense from our translation, but it is elegantly rendered. The first lines, both in Herder's version and that of our Bible, signify precisely the same thing, namely that the tribe of Dan shall be governed by a head or ruler, like the other tribes, being in this respect raised to precisely the same privileges with them. The name of Dan signifies judgment, so that a very beautiful turn is given to the sense, as our translators have rendered the clause, by this judicious appropriation of the name. Onkelos expounds the passage as referring to Samson, who was of the tribe of Dan, and judged Israel twenty years. Many commentators follow his interpretation, assuming that Jacob here promises Bilhah's son the same honour as the more distinguished tribes, of producing a judge who shall rule over the entire people of Israel.

I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord !

This line has exceedingly puzzled the commentators. It stands alone, entirely unconnected with what either precedes or follows it. Bishop Patrick offers a reasonable exposition. " Jacob, perceiving his approaching death, and his spirits beginning to fail him, in the middle of his speech to his sons, breaks off into this exclamation, which applies to none of them—' I wait, O Lord, for a happy deliverance out of this world into a better place.' " Herder reads—

I hope in thy salvation, O Jehovah.

And observes, " these words, which have been

thought so obscure, and have been so variously interpreted, seem to me to derive a pretty clear explanation from the connection in which they stand. On the north, the land of Judæa was exposed to the most powerful and dangerous attacks, as has been shown by the history of the various conquests and desolating incursions which it has experienced. And there must Dan have his dwelling-place! There must Jehovah bring deliverance to the nation, or they must perish! In such deliverance the patriarchal prophet confided, and by this expression showed how deeply he looked into the condition and wants of the country which his sons were to inhabit.”*

* *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, vol. ii. p. 149.

CHAPTER XV.

The benedictions pronounced upon Gad, Asher, and Napthali.

So far as we have yet proceeded with Jacob's prophecies, I think they have been satisfactorily shown to be of a highly poetical character. Indeed, it is eloquently and truly maintained by Bishop Lowth,* " that the prophetic office had a most strict connection with the poetic art. They had one common name, one common origin, one common author—the Holy Spirit. Those in particular were called to the exercise of the prophetic office, who were previously conversant with sacred poetry. It was equally a part of their duty to compose verses for the service of the church, and to declare the oracles of God: it cannot therefore be doubted, that a great portion of the sacred hymns may properly be termed prophecies, or that many of the prophecies are in reality hymns or poems. Since, as we have already proved, it was from the first a principal end and aim of poetry to impress upon the minds of men the sayings of the wise, and such precepts as related either to the principles

* Eighteenth Prælection.

of faith or laws of morality, as well as to transmit the same to posterity; it ought not to appear extraordinary that prophecy, which in this view ranks as a principal, and is of the highest importance, should not disdain the assistance of an art so admirably calculated to effect its purposes."

The benedictions pronounced upon Gad, Asher, and Napthali, consist each of a single couplet. The first is somewhat obscure, and the drift of it not very obvious:—

Gad, a troop shall overcome him,
But he shall overcome at the last.

Little or nothing is here foretold of Gad, and he can scarcely be said to have received a blessing. But may not this be expressive of the insignificance of that tribe which, when they marched out of Egypt under their chief Eliasaph, amounted to forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty men, but decreased in the wilderness to five thousand one hundred and fifty? The inheritance of Gad was a border country, and therefore constantly invaded, but the descendants of this patriarch, being a fierce and warlike race, as is almost invariably the case with borderers who are continually called upon to defend their territories from the sudden irruptions of neighbouring states, they at length succeeded in awing their enemies.

Gad, a troop shall overcome him.

This, no doubt, refers to the frequent incursions of the Ammonites and other nations dwelling on or near the frontier, by whom the

Gadites were often oppressed, sometimes suffering the extremest hardships of tyrannical domination; nevertheless, maintaining their freedom amidst every difficulty and in spite of perpetual opposition. They were vanquished, but not subdued. The hardships of war rendered them intractable, resolute, and brave; whilst the constant perils to which they were exposed, made them wary, active, and hardy. They were ever ready to contend for their liberties, with the courage of freemen, who knew how to value and were determined to possess them.

But he shall overcome at the last.

This most probably alludes to a signal victory obtained by the Gadites, in conjunction with the half-tribe of Manasseh, over the Hagarites, as related in the first of Chronicles v. 18—22, taking captive “of their camels fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of asses two thousand, and of men an hundred thousand.” After this victory, the Gadites maintained both their conquest and independence, keeping possession of their enemy’s territory until the captivity. They were among the best troops of the Israelites; and what is said respecting this tribe by Moses, when he blessed the children of Israel, just before his death,* is a sufficient attestation of their valour:—

Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad :
He dwelleth as a lion,
And teareth the arm with the crown of the head.

* See Deut. xxxiii. 20.

The word Gad signifies a troop, so that the name of this patriarch, as in other instances previously noticed, is made subservient to the purposes of prophecy; foretelling the temporal condition of his descendants. Hebrew scholars have remarked a singular alliteration in both lines of the distich in which this obscure prediction is comprehended. The original words are, in our common letters,—

Gad gedud yegudennu ;
Vehu yagud akeb.

This alliteration is of course lost in our English version, as it is impossible to preserve it; but in the original, it no doubt imparts grace as well as ornament to the passage, being unquestionably an artifice of composition. It must, however, be observed, that the poetical fervor rises or falls in these predictions in proportion as the subjects are susceptible or otherwise of poetical embellishment, which certainly is not predominant in the benediction pronounced upon Gad. It may, nevertheless, be taken as an advantageous contrast to the more ornate passages, throwing them out into more striking relief and imparting to them additional value, as the repose of a beautiful valley heightens the bolder and more diversified features of a magnificent landscape.

Dr. Durell suggests the following reading of this difficult passage :—

A troop shall invade Gad,
But he shall invade their rear.

“This part of the prophecy,” he observes, “seems to have been fulfilled sooner than any. Sihon, king of the Amorites, refused the Israelites a free passage through his country to the land of Canaan; and, not content with this, levied a large army; and, in conjunction with Og, the king of Bashan, marched out and attacked the Israelites under the conduct of Moses. The consequence of this rash expedition was, that both those kings and their armies met with a total overthrow, lost their country and all that they had. The country of the Amorites was given by Moses to the Gadites, probably because they had been chiefly instrumental in subduing it; and it is with reference to that grant, that what he says of this tribe in the parallel place (Deut. xxxiii. 21) is to be understood; and I think it is so here: but perhaps it may be capable of a greater latitude. For the Amorites vexed and oppressed the children of Israel which were on the other side Jordan during eighteen years, till Jephthah subdued them with a very great slaughter. (See Judges x. 8, xi. 33); and a long time after this event we find the Amorites in possession of the land of the Gadites; unto which these latter are promised to be restored, and the usurpers to be carried into captivity.” (Jer. xlix. 1—3.) Dr. Adam Clarke justly observes, on the last line of the above rendering,—

But he shall invade their rear,

that it “contains almost no meaning, as it only seems to state, that though the army which

invaded Gad should be successful, yet that the Gadites would harrass their rear as they returned : but this," as he truly says, "could never be a subject of sufficient consequence for a prophecy." He gives a translation of this couplet, which does not materially differ from that in our Bible, but is inferior to it :—

Gad, an army shall attack him,
And he shall attack in return.

This is extremely feeble. The second hemistich, in fact, promises nothing, since he may "attack in return," and be defeated. Besides, here no allusion is made to the name of Gad, which is done by all the commentators referred to. There is nothing to signalize the superior military character of that tribe. They were not only to attack, but to overcome: They were not merely a brave people, but frequently successful in war; and it is clear that Jacob intended to foretel something to Gad as well as to his other sons; he consequently promises them success after defeat. The writer in the *Biblica Critica* has rendered the couplet with a more just discrimination of the sense. I prefer it to any translation I have seen, and believe it to be the true reading :—

Gad, a troop may invade him,
But he shall invade afterwards.

The subjugation of the descendants of this patriarch is not here implied, but only that their territory might be invaded; for had they been entirely subdued, they could not have made re-

prisals upon the territories of those who really gained only temporary advantages over them. Their thus requiting their foes sufficiently marks their character as indomitable and warlike; their invasion moreover implies success, because their enemies are not mentioned as retaliating; and it is certain that they were very successful against the Hagarites, as related in 1 Chron. v. 18—22. Herder gives much the same interpretation as Durell:—

Gad [a troop] troops oppress him,
But he shall press upon their rear.

By a reference to the map of Canaan, it will be observed that the tribe of Gad, after the division of the promised land, were situated to the east of Jordan, and the spot which they occupied was granted to them because they possessed numerous flocks and herds; but upon the express condition, as they were notoriously brave, and possessed well-disciplined troops, that they should assist their countrymen in conquering the country west of the river Jordan. The territory of the Gadites lay between this river and the mountains of Gilead, which bounded them, the former on the west, the latter on the east. The tribe of Reuben flanked them on the north, and that of Manasseh on the south.

I pass now to the blessing on Asher:—

Out of Asher his bread shall be fat,
And he shall yield royal dainties.

This couplet represents the temporal prosperity of that tribe, their land being extremely

productive. The valley immediately beneath mount Carmel, and celebrated for its singular fertility, belonged to the posterity of Asher. The mountain itself was not situated in the division assigned to them. The word Carmel signifies vineyard; and to that mountain it was applied, because its sunny side was so productive of the fruit of the vine. The neighbouring country, likewise, forming a portion of the territory of Asher, partook of the fruitfulness of this distinguished hill, and thence it was that the richest productions of the soil accrued to them in such abundance, and it might truly be said, without a metaphor, to yield royal dainties.

To Asher were promised the blessings of abundance by means of a territorial possession, which would produce almost every variety of fruit and grain.

The name of this patriarch signifies blessed; and he had the happiness to hear his father declare, under the immediate influence of inspiration, that his descendants should enjoy the advantages of great agricultural prosperity. This was fully realized in subsequent generations after the division of the promised land, their portion being eminently productive of all the necessities of life, to which meaning we must refer the word bread in the text, that being a mere synecdoche, signifying, under one general term, every description of aliment. We find this acceptance of the word fully confirmed in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus, where, at the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, it

is stated, that when the children of Israel saw "a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground," "they said one to another, it is manna, for they wot not what it was. And Moses said unto them, this is the *bread* which the Lord hath given you to eat," or here is the food which the Lord has provided for your subsistence in the wilderness. Numerous passages might be quoted to confirm this import of the word, but it is needless to multiply quotations.

His bread shall be fat.

That is, the produce of his land shall be of the best quality: there shall be no sterile spots, in which only an inferior description of agrarian store can be harvested.

And he shall yield royal dainties.

It shall bring forth such delicious fruits, as well as corn, that the royal table shall be supplied from this portion of the posterity of Jacob. Solomon's table is supposed by some, and with much probability, to have been furnished with all necessaries, no less than with most of the luxuries which the gross appetites of that sensual monarch were prone to solicit, from the plentiful productions of that territory belonging to the tribe of Asher. It was extremely fertile.

Blossoms and fruits at once, of golden hue,
Appear'd with gay enamell'd colours mixed:
On which the sun, more glad, impress'd his beams,
Than in fair evening cloud, or humid bow

When God hath shower'd the earth ; so lovely seem'd
 That landscape : and of pure, now purer air,
 Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
 Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
 All sadness but despair.*

This picture of the primitive paradise may not unaptly be applied to the portion of Asher which was, as already observed, unusually productive both in grain and fruits. It was bounded by the land of Phœnicia on the west, by the tribes of Zebulun and Napthali on the east, by mount Lebanon on the north, by mount Carmel and the tribe of Issachar on the south.

Asher is a word implying happiness; and from this the authors of the "Universal History" have given a very significant paraphrase of the passage—"Asher's portion shall make him happy; it shall abound with excellent corn and oil; the bread and dainty meats that shall be made of them shall be fit for a king's table." The oil produced from the portion assigned to the posterity of this patriarch, was celebrated throughout the land of Canaan. Herder's version scarcely differs from that of our Bibles. In sense it is the same.

Out of Asher cometh bread that is rich,
 He it is that yieldeth dainties for kings.

In this single couplet an extensive picture of abundance is presented to the imagination. The terms are general, but they embrace great variety within the sphere of their signification. Had Jacob employed a number of sen-

* Milton.

tences in particularizing what should be the produce of Asher's inheritance, he would have made a much feebler impression than by the condensed mode of generalizing adopted in this benediction. 'It is full of sententious eloquence, and of that poetry which suggests rather than defines a reality, leaving the imagination to work out the description from a few strong but obvious elements, the verbal signs, comprised within two short hemistichs, suggesting enlarged and complex trains of thought.

The patriarch thus proceeds—

Naphthali is a hind let loose,
He giveth goodly words.

The sense is here by no means evident. "Most of the Rabbins, and many Christian commentators, apply this to Barak, who was of the tribe of Napthali, and who at first showed the fear of a hind, by refusing to march against the Canaanites unless the prophetess Deborah would accompany him; but he afterwards imitated the swiftness of a hind in pursuit of his enemies. (Judges iv. 6.) He signalized his eloquence also in that sublime canticle which he composed with Deborah, to give thanks to God for their victory."* This appears to me not only a forced but a very restricted interpretation; for why Jacob should confine his prophecy upon this tribe to a single event in the life of one of Napthali's descendants, it is impossible to say. Neither does it appear at all certain, from the

* See Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, art. Napthali.

Scripture account, that Barak was really concerned in the composition of that divine canticle sung by him and Deborah after their victory over the Canaanites. The composition was much more likely to have been the sole production of the prophetess, an inspired and gifted woman, than of a man evidently of no extraordinary endowments. I see nothing in the sacred text to verify the conclusion that Barak had any share in composing that exquisite hymn of thanksgiving which he sung with the "Mother in Israel," who roused him to lead the armies of Israel to battle against the common enemy. I therefore approve of Pyles' note—"On occasion of the foregoing deliverance," says that judicious commentator, "by the assistance of prophetic inspiration, Deborah composed the following elegant and majestic hymn, which Barak the general, in conjunction with her authority, ordered to be sung by the people in religious commemoration of so signal a mercy, and for preserving in the minds of the Israelites a sense of their future duty and of their gratitude."

Bochart, an eminent scholar, adopting the reading of the seventy, renders this obscure passage as follows:—

Napthali is a spreading oak,
Producing beautiful branches.

"This," says Dr. Adam Clarke, "is as literal as it is correct. Our own translation scarcely gives any sense. The fruitfulness of this tribe in children may be here intended. From his four

sons, Jahzeel, Guni, and Shillem, whom he took down into Egypt, (chap. xlv. 24,) in the course of two hundred and fifteen years there sprang of effective men, fifty-three thousand four hundred; but as great increase in this way was not an uncommon case among the descendants of Jacob, this may refer to the fruitfulness of their soil, and the special providential care and blessing of the Almighty; to which, indeed, Moses seems particularly to refer (Deut. xxxiii. 23.)

O Napthali! satisfied with favour,
And full with the blessing of the Lord.

“So that he may be represented under the notion of a tree planted in a rich soil, growing to a prodigious size, extending its branches in all directions, and becoming a shade for men and cattle, and a harbour for the fowls of heaven.” Dr. Durell approves of Bochart’s rendering; but another translation has been suggested, which I prefer to any of the foregoing. It is this,—

Napthali is a deer roaming at liberty,
He shooteth forth noble branches,

that is, majestic antlers. The horns of a stag are ample or stunted in proportion to the richness or penury of his pasture. The prediction, then, of Jacob means;—Napthali shall inhabit a country so rich, fertile, and quiet, that, after having fed to the full on the most nutritious pasturage, he shall shoot out branches, or antlers, of the most majestic magnitude. Thus the patriarch indirectly denotes the happy lot of Napthali. And, in fact, the lot of this tribe

was rich in pasture, and the soil very fruitful in corn and oil. It has been remarked, that the branching horns might, allegorically, denote abundance of descendants; and that, though only four sons are reckoned to Napthali when he went down to Egypt (Gen. xlv. 24), yet this tribe, at the Exodus, numbered above fifty thousand men.*

The version last given appears to me, in every respect, unexceptionable. It is at once intelligible and poetical in the most extended sense of the word; not only so, but it is more consonant to the character of the tribe which it represents. The imagery is singularly rich and appropriate; besides, the comparison being fuller and more immediately obvious, than that proposed by Bochart after the seventy, to which, though he is followed by a large number of eminent commentators, I cannot yield the preference against the strong and uncontrollable suggestions of my own mind, which, however misdirected, will nevertheless sway my decisions. To me there is something magnificent in the picture displayed by the interpretation last proposed. The imagination becomes at once imbued with the rich and vigorous image which pervades it, like a sweet essence, producing a lively impression, not to be effaced, of the freedom and abundance thus promised to the posterity of Rachel's handmaiden. The mind is elevated and the heart warmed by the exciting beauty of the passage, which at once wins our

* See Scripture illustrated by means of Natural Science.

favour towards the descendants of Bilhah's sixth son, a community afterwards notably distinguished by our blessed Lord, who preached more frequently, and with more apparent success, among the tribe of Napthali, than in any other part of Judæa.*

With what versatile power of application is this exquisite description varied from the prediction that precedes it, which likewise denotes, but in terms how much less eloquently, the fruitfulness and prosperity, with relation both to their territorial and social condition, of the descendants of Asher. The illustration applied to the sons of Napthali, according to the reading just given, is, as I have said, not only exquisitely poetical, but, at the same time, singularly accurate.

Napthali is a deer roaming at liberty,
He shooteth forth noble branches.

He is like a strong and vigorous stag which descends from the mountains, where he has been accustomed to roam free and undisturbed, to graze on the richer pastures of the plain, which is shown by the strength and amplitude of his antlers, for these become luxuriant or dwarfed in their growth, according to the richness or sterility of the soil in which he feeds.

It is quite astonishing to observe, even where the same or a similar consummation forms the subject of prophecy, how skilfully the poetical array is varied. Even the repetitions which so commonly occur, are accompanied by such ele-

* See Matthew iv. 13—16.

gant supplemental graces, such bold inflections of phrase, and such prismatic turns of thought, as to impart not only the charm of variety, but great additional spirit to the passages they are intended to embellish. Frequently, the figures employed to designate the same facts, or to characterize the same results under different conditions of circumstance, are as unlike as if they were intended to represent objects altogether oppugnant; and this inexhaustible variety, this profuse luxuriance, is not one of the least beauties of Hebrew poetry, which is distinguished by two very opposite qualities, condensation and exuberance;—condensation of thought and expression, and exuberance of imagery.

The limits of the tribe of Napthali extended into Upper and Lower Galilee, being bounded by the river Jordan on the east, by the portions of Asher and Zebulun on the west, by mount Libanus on the north, and by the tribe of Issachar on the south.

CHAPTER XVI.

The benediction pronounced upon Joseph.

THE blessing poured out upon Joseph is the most remarkable of the whole series. It contains some passages of almost inscrutable difficulty.

Joseph is a fruitful bough,
Even a fruitful bough by a well ;
Whose branches run over the wall.
The archers have sorely grieved him,
And shot at him, and hated him.
But his bow abode in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.
(From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel,)
Even by the God of thy Father, who shall help thee,
And by the Almighty, who shall bless thee
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lieth under,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.
The blessings of thy father have prevailed
Above the blessings of my progenitors,
Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills ;
They shall be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him
That was separate from his brethren.

The first triplet in this highly figurative composition is full of beauty, though it must be confessed, that the interpretation is encumbered with some perplexity. Although, however, the

meaning is in a degree embarrassed, I think an obvious exposition may be easily found.

Joseph was his father's favourite son, and by much the most celebrated of his whole family; indeed, it may be truly said, that he was one of the greatest men of his time; nor do I think, upon the whole, that history exhibits a greater, if we refer to his conduct under difficulties the most startling, and under dangers the most trying. He was truly a great man, whether we look at him as a statesman, as a ruler, or in his social and kindred relations, in all which he was eminently distinguished. Jacob, therefore, bestows upon him a lengthened blessing full of fervour and sublimity. Nothing can exceed the grandeur of some parts of this prophecy. Joseph is compared to a bough, or rather to a fruitful vine, for this idea is evidently suggested by the passage, planted by a fountain, by means of which its productiveness is perpetually maintained. This prediction was accomplished in the posterity of Joseph; for in two hundred years from the delivery of the benediction, they amounted to seventy-two thousand seven hundred effective men. The line,

Whose branches run over the wall,

has been variously interpreted. I, however, believe it to be nothing more than an amplification, or rather, an extension of the image, representing the growth of a vine, which spreads with vast rapidity when supported by a wall. This, catching the warmth of the solar beam, diffuses it over the spreading growth, cherishing the

tender branches, and causing them to throw out their fruit in luxuriant abundance. Its roots absorb the moisture of the pure fountain waters, which causes its sap to rise and extend to the remotest shoots. Thus every part of the vine is nourished into a plentiful produce. In like manner, the posterity of Joseph, being especially sustained by the arm of Divine Providence, multiplied exceedingly, thus amply fulfilling the prophecy. There is an allusion here, as in most of the other blessings pronounced by the venerable patriarch, severally, upon his twelve sons, to Joseph's name, which imports growth or increase; thus the image, in the first hemistich of this benediction, is beautifully adapted to illustrate the productiveness implied by Joseph's name, and most fully realised in little more than two hundred years after this extraordinary prediction was delivered. This part of the prophecy had, no doubt, a general, but, nevertheless, indirect reference to the pre-eminent dignity to which Joseph was advanced, and to the vast wealth he acquired under Pharaoh, who, after the cruelty practised towards their father's favourite son by the brethren of the unhappy Hebrew, made him second only to royalty in the government of Egypt, advancing him to a degree of power and authority unparalleled in the history of nations.

There is a version of this triplet, for which many contend; and it is declared, especially by the authors of the "Universal History," to be the true reading; but this, I confess, is to me more than doubtful; and I should be disposed

to think so, if for no other reason than that it gives a feeble and puerile sense. The proposed change is as follows :—

Joseph is a son of beauty,
The daughters ran upon the walls to see him,

which they paraphrase thus : “ Joseph shall increase daily more and more, as his name doth emphatically imply : his beauty attracted the eyes of the fair sex ; the damsels ran upon the walls to see him.” But how greatly does this descend in dignity from the elevation of the passage as given in our authorized version. The latter exhibits a magnificent image, the former, a mere prurient description, akin to the vapid sentiment of a love-song. The one is in the highest degree expressive, the other, in the last degree, trivial ; it is altogether beneath the dignity of the subject. The idea of a number of curious women crowding upon the house-tops to gaze at a man’s beauty, has nothing in it becoming the solemn dignity of prophecy ; for, though many parts of this benediction manifestly refer to Joseph personally, yet the main design of the whole is to depict the temporal condition of his posterity. There can be no doubt that the original word translated branches in our Bible, signifies literally daughters, as in the margin ; but that it is used figuratively the context shows sufficiently plain, Joseph being represented as a fruitful bough, or prolific tree, such as the vine, the branches or offspring of which speedily grow to productive maturity. In my judgment, the phrase, “ daughters of the

vine," is not simply an agreeable, but, likewise, a very expressive metaphor.

Mr. Roberts, in his oriental illustrations, has some interesting remarks upon the opening triplet of this blessing. Having quoted the passage, he says,* "all this falls very naturally on an eastern ear. Joseph was the fruitful bough of Jacob; and, being planted near a *well*, his leaf would not wither, and he would bring forth his fruit in his season.

"Great delight is taken in all kinds of creepers which bear edible fruits; and the natives allow them to run over the *walls* and *roofs* of their houses.

"The term 'branches' in the verse, is in the margin rendered 'daughters;' and it is an interesting fact, and one which will throw light on some other passages, that the same term is used in India to denote the same thing. That man has only one *chede*, that is, branch or daughter. 'The youngest chede (branch) has been married this day.' 'Where are your branches? They are all married.' 'What! a young branch to be in this state; how soon it has given fruit!' When a mother has had a large family—'That branch has borne plenty of fruit.' A husband will say to his wife who is sterile; 'Of what use is a branch which bears no fruit.' The figure is much used in poetry."

The passage, according to the common reading, may be thus paraphrased: Joseph, in his personal distinctions, and the prodigious increase

* Oriental Illustrations, p. 55.

of his posterity, is fitly compared to a prolific vine planted by an overflowing fountain, that conveys constant nourishment to its roots, thus causing its branches to overspread the wall by which it is supported, and consequently, to yield an abundant supply of fruit.

Most of the interpretations of this difficult passage which I have seen, given under an assumption that our version does not exhibit the true reading, are forced and tortured, by no means abating the obscurity, but much abridging the beauty. As an example, I will take the version of Durell, who appears to me to have greatly perplexed the sense, instead of throwing any additional light upon it. He reads,—

Joseph is a bullock,
A bullock near a fountain,
My son, my young one was upon the wall.

His justification of this rendering is any thing but satisfactory. "My reasons," he says, "for giving the word bullock the preference, are, that Moses, in blessing Joseph (Deut. xxxiii. 17), compares him to a bullock, whose horns," he says, "denote Ephraim and Manasseh; in lieu of which, these two sons of that patriarch may perhaps be thought to be pointed out here, by the repetition of the word bullock. Though what is now alleged would be no argument in regard to some of the other tribes, yet it seems to have no little weight here, on account of the great affinity in most parts, and even identity of other parts, of the blessing given to this patriarch in both places. Again, the notion of a bullock,

the most lordly of beasts of pasture, seems better adapted to the tribe which so long governed the other tribes of Israel, and was so distinguished for its valour and strength, than that of a twig or tender shoot: to which may be added, that it is not probable it could have been Jacob's design to have compared Napthali, no very considerable tribe, to a stately tree, and Joseph, one of the two tribes by far the most powerful, to so low an object. We may observe further, that though the image of a 'tree planted by the rivers of water' (Psalm i. 3) is very natural, yet the expression, *a young branch by a well*, may not be thought to convey that idea very distinctly, except a *well* is here put, by a metonymy, for a *soil through which water flows*; and as it will then be very suitable for a plantation, so likewise will it be the fittest for cattle, and indicate with sufficient clearness, that Joseph's portion would be remarkable for cattle and pasture. It should also be observed, that the idea could not be expressed more concisely or emphatically than by this word. And the propriety of Jacob's mentioning that circumstance will be more evident, if we recollect the great difficulties which his father and grandfather had in relation to the wells and cisterns which they had digged for watering their herds (chapter xxi. 26, xxvi. 20). Fountains, moreover, were esteemed such an advantage in a hot climate that the sacred historian does not think them unworthy of notice; and one of the excellencies of the land of Judæa was, that it was to be *a land of fountains*." (Deut. viii. 7, xxxiii. 28).

Here is a vast deal of ingenious speculation thrown away, since the whole reasoning is the most inconclusive imaginable. The idea is perfectly futile, of substituting the word bullock for bough only because it accords with a passage of Moses' benediction upon the sons of Jacob, by no means parallel, but in which the Hebrew lawgiver in a line of singular obscurity, is supposed to allude to the tribe of Ephraim having the sovereign authority established in it; for Jeroboam, who reigned over the ten tribes, was of this tribe, as was likewise Joshua, the first supreme ruler over the Israelites after Moses; whereas, the opening of Jacob's benediction on Joseph, especially refers to the prodigious increase of that son's posterity. The argument respecting Napthali being compared to a stately tree, and Joseph to a *tender shoot*, falls at once to the ground, if the reading be adopted in which Napthali is compared to a stag with luxuriant antlers; and that a tender shoot could not have been intended in the comparison applied to Joseph in our version of the Bible, is evident; for how could the *branches* of a *tender shoot* run over a wall. It is clear that the bough was a prolific and luxuriant tree of the creeper kind, most probably the vine, a happy and most significant emblem of fecundity, in truth, far more appropriate than a stately oak, which implies rather strength and majesty than fecundity. The supposition, too, of a well being put, by a metonymy, for *a soil*, through which water flows, is so violent a straining of the sense, as to be beyond all bounds of likelihood; for if such a mode of in-

terpretation were admitted, no part of the sacred writings would be secure from the most distorted readings, and such meanings might be assumed as would suit any doctrine, so that even atheism itself might, with some show of probability, ground itself upon the sanctions of scripture.

My son, my young one was upon the wall.

Durell supposes this to allude to Joseph's being exposed to danger, as the phrase, leaping over the wall, implies an escape from danger; but really, according to this exposition, we have to delve so deeply into the subtleties of meaning, for, after all, an unsatisfactory solution of a difficulty rendered so much more clear in our authorized translation, that I am sure the result neither justifies nor repays the labour.

Herder gives a very elegant turn to the passage—

*The son of a fruitful mother is Joseph,
The branch of a fruitful tree by the well,
Whose branches shoot over the wall.*

Here a beautiful parallelism is exhibited, which rises with an extremely happy gradation of expression from the literal into the figurative, ending in an imperfect, indeed, but agreeable climax. There is no obscurity whatever in this reading; and it is, moreover, gracefully poetical. The simple thought being first expressed, and then, as it were, amplified to the mental perception through the medium of a forcible image, is happily conceived, and as happily effectuated. I confess, to me there is a great charm in this

rendering ; and, upon the whole, I give it the preference to any I have met with. I should have preferred the word parent in the first line to mother, as it would then naturally refer to Jacob, whose posterity increased so vastly, that in two hundred and fifteen years, they amounted to more than six hundred thousand men, besides women and children.

The next couplet of this remarkable prophecy has less obscurity than the lines which precede it.

The archers have sorely grieved him,
And shot at him and hated him.

Joseph's brethren are evidently alluded to in these lines, they being shepherds who went armed to protect their flocks in the deserts, a practice, in those times, common in all thinly inhabited districts. Bows and arrows were the usual arms of the country at that period, as they are in most parts of the east at this day. They are weapons which the forests and swamps supply, and therefore common to all countries where the more intricate refinements of art are unknown.

They shot at him, and hated him,

that is, metaphorically speaking, they endeavoured to do him personal mischief. They directed their arrows at him, so to speak, and tried to wound him : they hated him, and therefore treacherously conspired against his life. Here is an instance of that extreme condensation which is so prominent an attribute of Hebrew poetry, giving little more than a bare intimation of the sense under some illustrative symbol, but

conveying, by that symbol, an extent of signification scarcely to be conceived, until the passage is examined with critical scrutiny. The sense is sufficiently clear, and the allusions cannot well be mistaken, though both are couched in language highly figurative and condensed. The former rises with a regular advance of force. The brothers commenced their career of inhumanity towards Joseph with bitter reproaches and abusive taunts; they launched their calumnies against him, they heaped railings upon him; by these and other acts of unfraternal malice, "they sorely grieved him." They next, with cold-blooded atrocity, plotted against his life, and, as a climax to their unnatural guilt, sold him for a slave, a condition far worse than death. They manifested their hatred in almost every possible shape. The result of all this was extreme misery, for a while, to the innocent object of it. He was reduced to a state of degrading and odious servitude, to bondage in a heathen land, where the most revolting reptiles were worshipped as divinities, their dead bodies embalmed and preserved for ages to sanctify a superstition at once fabulous and bestial. He was not only reduced to slavery, but, when advanced to the comparative dignity of a domestic servant in the household of an officer of the Egyptian monarch, he was accused of an attempt to dishonour his master's bed, imprisoned, and exposed to the hazard of forfeiting his life under that atrocious accusation. From this hard trial of his virtue he was finally rescued by the hand of Him who always has a reward for the

righteous, and "is a buckler to all them that walk uprightly," Joseph being eventually raised to the highest authority in the kingdom of Pharaoh.

Dr. Waterland gives a very intelligible reading of this couplet, which, it must be conceded, is less obscure than that of our Bible, the chief points of the sentence being distributed with less confusion.

The archers have shot at him with poisoned arrows,
They have pursued him with hatred.

Dr. Adam Clarke suggests a much less figurative translation.

They sorely afflicted him and contended with him ;
The chief archers had him in hatred.

There is, however, not much difference in the vital sense of any of these versions. They each admit of essentially the same interpretation.

But his bow abode in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

In this triplet, the metaphor of a bow, with which Joseph is represented armed, is continued. He, as well as his brethren, was a keeper of his father's flocks, and had, consequently, like them, been put in a condition to defend them, when committed to his trust, against the attacks of wild beasts. He was not, therefore, without his bow and quiver, the former of which the prophet represents as remaining unbroken amid the repeated assaults which he sustained, first, from

his brethren, afterwards, from the wife of his master in Egypt, who looked upon him with eyes of unholy love, and finally, through the false accusation of that treacherous mistress, from Potiphar himself. "All these he endured," says Dr. Dodd, "with unbroken fortitude, like a tough bow, which, though long employed in battle, neither breaks nor becomes more flexible." Bishop Kidder makes some observations on this verse no less eloquent than just. "The divine help and mercy did not forsake Joseph: he was preserved and relieved by the mighty God of Israel. By Him he was kept alive when his death was designed; preserved chaste when he was greatly tempted to lewdness; rendered prosperous in his lowest circumstances; from them advanced to great dignity, and made an instrument of very great good to others."

Perhaps there is not a character upon record of which it can be said, with equal truth, that, during a long term of trial, in which he was subjected to sufferings the most opposite and severe, amid temptations the most trying, and changes the most perilous to moral purity, he sustained himself with singular resignation, magnanimity, and self-denial, upon no occasion either yielding to the solicitations of dissatisfaction or compromising his own dignity. Where, in history, do we meet with a man in whom the imperfections of our common nature were so little conspicuous as in this son of the venerable patriarch, from whom sprang the heads of the twelve tribes? His life, so far as we are acquainted with it, does not exhibit a single instance of moral obliquity, and I think

we may safely pronounce him, after that august being who knew no sin, the purest of men. "His bow abode in strength" to the last moment of his life. The vigour of his morality did not abate, nor the purity of his soul decline with years, but, like a setting star, which shines with undiminished brightness to the verge of the horizon, he sank into the dark valley of death, bounded by the realms of everlasting light, the glory of his virtues undimmed, and bearing a passport for immortality sealed with the signet of true holiness.

And the arms of his hands were made strong.

This is an evident, but, nevertheless, very significant pleonasm. Joseph's trust in God was not only rewarded with deliverance, but with power. He was endowed with a marvellous capacity for legislation, being the political oracle of his time—at once the counsellor of a great king, and the ruler of a distinguished people. He governed Egypt, amid civil and social difficulties, amid fearful and trying contingencies, with a sagacity and foresight which God alone could have supplied. He became an illustrious instrument of omnipotent mercy. He was endowed with wisdom from on high to meet those awful casualties with which the Deity was about to visit a corrupt and idolatrous land. To his wisdom neighbouring nations bowed, and under his judicious rule, the kingdom of Egypt prospered at a period of universal distraction, when famine was in the land, which for seven years withheld its customary supplies. During such a melancholy crisis the

most prudent circumspection, the most judicious application of means, the most dexterous adaptation of resources were requisite to meet exigencies so alarming, and perplexities so difficult to surmount. In a time of such political vicissitude, when the civil aspects of governments changed almost as frequently as the seasons, surrounded with dangers, under the menacing approximation of which an ordinary mind would have sunk into impotency, this great and good man trusted in God, and was sustained ;

The arms of his hands were made strong.

Many commentators, with a fastidiousness, in my humble judgment, far more nice than just, have endeavoured to relieve the text from what they imagine the incongruity of this figure. I cannot but think, nevertheless, that it is wonderfully forcible and significative. It is, moreover, a current oriental expression even at this day ; “ for it is a common thing to say,” says Mr. Roberts* in his “ Oriental Illustrations of the Scriptures,” “ Ah, look at the hands of his arms ! how powerful are the hands of his shoulders !” And why should this highly characteristic eastern image be repudiated in accordance with the severe tastes of learned scholiasts, who cannot perceive its beauty through the mists with which extreme learning has enveloped their intellects. The hands are the mere instruments of operation : in the arms lie all the strength, and consequently, the means of rendering any manual

* Page 55.

operation effective. In these are placed the muscles, fibres, sinews, and nerves, which administer to the hand the power of action. Through them circulates the blood that gives vitality to the hand. They are the seat of muscular energy, of vascular activity, and of that exquisite distribution of the membral economy of animal conformation which realizes manual power. The expression, therefore, to which objection has been taken upon the authority of some learned commentators, of whom I shall have to speak presently, is, to my apprehension, singularly pertinent and descriptive. It is a skilful display of verbal adaptation, in which the redundancy not only strengthens, but, at the same time, elevates while it amplifies the sense.

By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

Observe how finely the terms are discriminated in this hemistich, and that which precedes it. The same metaphor, though with a remarkable distinction, is applied both to God and to Joseph. In its application to the Deity, it is employed broadly, because the figure of hands can be adapted no other way than metaphorically in connexion with "the mighty God of Jacob" and of the universe. He is without body or members, consequently, the term hands can only be used as significative of the divine communication of power to Joseph. As, on the contrary, members form a part of man, to Joseph the expression, "arms of his hands," would apply literally as well as metaphorically; it is therefore employed in a more extended sense, and with a

greater degree of detail, because intended, on the one hand, to bring to the mind the idea of man, which is definite, but on the other, to convey the notion, which must ever be indefinite, of Divinity in the abstract, in the plenitude of his vast and incommunicable attributes. Thus it is that the metaphor, in the one case, is used specifically, in the other, generally. Applied to Joseph, with its kindred specification, it represents mere human power; applied to God, without any such specification, it conveys an exalted expression of the divine. General terms suit that alone of which a general or indefinite idea only can be formed; but when the idea is to be distinctly defined, then relative and special terms must be sought to give it form and identity. If, for instance, we were to say of the Deity, that his countenance was radiant with celestial glory, this would convey to the mind no positive image of features in the Godhead, but only one grand general, yet indefinite idea, of heavenly intelligence and sublime effulgence; but if we were to sum up the lineaments of the Divinity in detail, or even refer to them in the mass, the general notion would be immediately resolved into the specific, and could no longer apply to the vast and undefinable Omnipotent. On the other hand, if we were to say of a man, that his features were like those of the Olympian Jove from the hand of Phidias, that his eyes were full of fire, that his nose exhibited the most exquisite symmetry, his mouth the most winning expression, a sensible picture of human beauty, of distinct qualities of form, and relative

appropriations of harmony of proportion would be at once present to the imagination. It would receive a tangible image, which would remain, as it were, whole and perfect before it, consonant to, and illustrative of, certain physical organizations in man. The distinction, therefore, which I have pointed out in the two clauses of the blessing last quoted, is one exhibiting the finest discrimination, and, at the same time, a very just perception of poetical beauty. Le Clerc, in order to obviate what he conceives the incongruity of the pleonasm, renders the clause *auctæ sunt vires manuum ejus*, the strength of his arms is increased; but this only simplifies the sentence by getting rid of the redundancy, and thus of all the poetical grace arising from it, which is rather a loss than a gain.

Durell gives a different sense altogether, but, as is not unfrequently the case with him, he renders the passage much more obscure than he found it, without leaving any equivalent for that of which he deprives it. He supposes that "arms" refer to the bow, the extremities of which he imagines to have been called by the Hebrews, arms; he therefore translates the two first lines of the triplet,

But his bow returned with force,
And his hands bent its arms.

"Upon the whole," he says, "if it is imagined that we have not sufficient authority to give *zeruoiu* the sense here proposed, there certainly cannot be any objection to rendering this hemistich thus,

And his hands enlarged (or confirmed) its power."

My objection to both these interpretations is, that they are puerile and insignificant ; for how could the arms or extremities of a bow be bent but by the hands of the archer, or how could its power be enlarged or confirmed but by the same means ? Both renderings convey merely two self-evident consequences.

An ingenious version of this difficult passage is given in the two hundred and twenty-second fragment of "Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible," but which, to my mind, is not at all satisfactory, though very plausibly justified.

Yet his bow retained its spring,
And the arms of its hands were strengthened
By the power of the Mighty One of Jacob.

Here follows the justification of this reading. "As the arms of a bow of steel are strengthened by the coils of rope or hair which augment their powers, the elasticity or spring of which is the very strength of the instrument, and as on their retention of the elastic power depends the action of the whole weapon, so God, by enduing Joseph with patience and self-possession under calamity and rough usage (compared to many discharges of the bow, which are calculated to diminish or exhaust its elasticity) supported him, maintained his piety, and at length rewarded it by prosperity."

The cross-bow would appear to be here implied, as the common hand-bow could not have been made of steel, since it would have required much more than the usual manual force to impel an arrow from it: moreover, it is hardly to be

supposed that in those times of primitive simplicity the most complex description of bow was used; for this latter evidently belongs to a more advanced period of civilization. Shepherds watching their flocks were likely only to have assumed the rudest and simplest arms; the comparison, therefore, that would have naturally suggested itself to the patriarch's mind on this occasion, was the rustic bow of the shepherd, not the complex bow of the mail-clad warrior.

"The expression," observes the writer just quoted, "as it stands in our translation, and in the original so understood, 'the arms of his hands,' that is, of Joseph's hands, is too harsh to be borne. Le Clerc would translate the *strength* of his arms, saying arms often signify strength. Houbigant admits this, but says it is never, in that case, 'arms of his hands,' which, as he observes, is a false figure of speech. *Hands of his arms* might be tolerated, but *arms of his hands* is intolerable." The question of its incongruity is, I think, at once answered by the fact, that the expression is oriental, and used commonly at this day in the east, as I can testify from personal experience.

From thence is the shepherd the stone of Israel.

This is a passage of unusual obscurity. The commentators make little or nothing of it. I understand it to mean, from thence, that is, from God, is the divine Shepherd, the Messiah, the Stone of Israel, or the Rock of Ages, a rock being the emblem of everlasting power. The original promise of salvation through Christ is perpetually

brought to the recollection of the seed of Abraham, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, either directly or by inference. The common interpretation of this clause is, that through the divine favour, Jacob is become the nourisher, signified under the term shepherd, and supporter, signified under the term stone, of his father's numerous family ; the prophet, dropping, for a moment, the prophetical strain, and passing from the past to the present, then, again, immediately on to the future.

I confess I do not concur in this interpretation, as it appears to me that the drift of the passage is to recal to the minds of Jacob's sons the great promise of a Redeemer, whose day their progenitor Abraham rejoiced to see ; both the terms, shepherd* and stone† being frequently applied to Christ in the New Testament, in express allusion, as I conceive, to this blessing. His advent was looked for by the patriarchs as an event of rejoicing to all people. They might have justly exclaimed, in the words employed by our own bard, since a Redeemer was the august object of expectation from the loss of paradise to the reign of Herod—

The Saviour comes, by ancient bards foretold ;
Hear him, ye deaf, and all ye blind, behold !
He from thick films shall purge the visual ray,
And on the sightless eye-ball pour the day :
'Tis he the obstructed paths of sound shall clear,
And bid new music charm the unfolding ear :
The dumb shall sing, the lame his crutch forego,
And leap, exulting, like the bounding roe :

* See John x. 12, xiv. 16 ; Heb. xiii. 20 ; 1 Pet. ii. 25.

† Matt. xxi. 44 ; Luke xx. 17, 18 ; Acts iv. 11 ; 1 Pet. ii. 4, 7.

No sigh, no murmur the wide world shall hear,
 From every face he wipes off every tear.
 In adamantine chains shall death be bound,
 And hell's grim tyrant feel the eternal wound.

(Pope's Messiah.)

In the subsequent line to that which I have just been considering, the thread of the context is taken up, and the prophecy immediately proceeds. Jacob had before said of his favourite son,

And the arms of his hands were made strong
 By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

The latter part of this declaration he repeats in substance, but with still greater emphasis.

Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee,
 And by the Almighty, who shall bless thee
 With blessings of heaven above,
 Blessings of the deep that lieth under,
 Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

In the latter three lines the constructive parallelism may be traced, though they would be more obvious if the triplet were given thus—

With blessings of the heavens above, }
 With blessings of the deeps beneath, }
 With blessings of the breasts and womb.

In the first two lines, moreover, there is a favourable specimen of the antithetical parallelism, strongly and elegantly marked in the general but emphatic terms, "heavens above" and "deeps beneath." The whole, too, rises into a fine climax. The first blessings mentioned are those derived from the firmament, that is, that the land should be nourished with fostering and genial dews.

The next are those derived from the deep. Joseph's territories were to abound with springs and rivers, a sovereign blessing in all eastern countries, by which they should be rendered abundantly fruitful. The last blessing is a vast possession of flocks and herds, together with a numerous posterity; and how this latter part of the prophecy was verified may be seen from the first chapter of Numbers, where, from the thirty-second to the thirty-sixth verse, it is stated, that at the first enumeration of the people made after their departure out of Egypt, the posterity of Joseph amounted to seventy-two thousand seven hundred men, Judah, the most numerous of all the tribes, only exceeding it by nineteen hundred men.

Some commentators imagine that by the promise of blessings in the deep beneath may be meant the riches which are taken from the bowels of the earth, and that, therefore, the portion assigned to the posterity of Joseph would abound with rich mines, as well as with springs and streams. It may likewise signify, that the numerous rivers flowing through their territory would enable them readily to avail themselves of the fruits of commerce, and thus to derive a portion of their abundance from the sea as well as from the earth, so that every part of the material world should contribute towards the prosperity of the descendants of this good and highly gifted patriarch.

"The God of thy father," in the first line of the last extract, is something more than a mere repetition of "the God of Jacob" in the line

preceding. There is a pathos as well as an elevation in the one, which does not exist in the other. As if the venerable prophet had said, 'the arms of thy hands are made strong by the God, not only of Jacob generally, that is, of his living descendants, from whose posterity all the families of the earth were to inherit the pre-eminent blessing of redemption, but of thy father especially, thy immediate parent, who has loved thee through life with a deep and abiding affection.' Thus it will be seen, that in the two hemistichs just referred to, the terms, God of JACOB and God of thy FATHER, are not strictly synonymous, but cognate terms merely, the first applying to Jacob, as the progenitor of the Israelites collectively, the latter applying to him as the father of Joseph individually and apart from his general descendants. These fine gradations of sense and delicate tints of meaning, in words apparently synonymous, constitute a very prominent feature in Hebrew poetry. From the sixth clause of this prophecy, the writer in the "Critica Biblica,"* already quoted, translates, after Calmet and Durell, the several hemistichs as follows:—

Notwithstanding, his bow retained its spring;
 And strengthened became the arms of his hands,
 By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob:
 Thence he became a shepherd, a Rock of Israel,
 By the God of thy father; and may he help thee!
 Even the All-Bountiful; and may he bless thee!
 The blessings of the heavens from above,
 The blessings of the deep lying beneath,
 Blessings of the breasts and of the womb,
 The blessings of thy father:—be prevalent

* See Vol. I of this Work. Page 220.

Above the blessings of the eternal mountains ;
 The desirable things of the everlasting hills !
 Let them be on the top of Joseph ;
 Even the head of the distinguished of his brethren !

In the two first lines of the above it will be evident that the writer has followed that interpretation of the passage given in the fragment of Calmet's Dictionary already quoted. The subsequent clauses are produced with much perspicuity. They do not essentially differ from the common reading, but the parallelisms are more distinctly observed. A very agreeable epanodos might have been formed in the third couplet, had the terms commencing the second line been thus transposed,—

By the God of thy father : and may he help thee !
 And may he bless thee !—even the All-Bountiful !

This is so accordant with the Hebrew mode of inversion, that its concinnity will hardly be disputed. It will be observed, that according to our authorized translation, this singular benediction concludes with two triplets, and both are remarkably striking for their beauties of composition. The first is supremely elegant:

The blessings of thy father have prevailed
 Above the blessings of thy progenitors,
 Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.

“That is,” says Bishop Kidder, “the blessings which I have received, and with which I bless thee and thy brethren, are greater than the blessings of my progenitors Abraham and Isaac.” The last line of the triplet is perfectly sublime.

A numerous progeny was considered by the

Hebrews as among the greatest of earthly benefactions; Jacob was consequently more blessed in this particular certainly than either Abraham or Isaac, as he had a greater number of children who were to be the heads of numerous and distinguished posterities, each of these inheriting a portion of the land of promise.

Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills,

is a grand image, expressive of the greatness and duration of the Israelites, of whom the posterity of Joseph formed a considerable portion, as a political community. "The words may imply," says Bishop Kidder, "either the plenty of that part of Canaan which was the lot of Joseph's children, comprehending the mountains of Ephraim, Samaria, and Bashan (Deut. xxxiii. 15), or the eminence and long duration of these blessings, metaphorically expressed by the height and duration of ancient hills." (Isaiah liv. 10.) The blessings referred to in the triplet now under consideration, as accruing, not only to the posterity of Joseph, but to the whole nation of the Israelites, and, through them, to the entire human race, are those which are to last beyond the boundaries of time, as they shall be communicated to all "nations and kindred and tongues," through the divine announcer of glad tidings to every descendant of Adam—our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. He was to be born from the posterity of Jacob; and through that patriarch all the earth was to be rendered eligible for the salvation of their God—a blessing which shall be "eternal in the heavens."

perate and favourable climate, with a productive soil, genial seasons, a salubrious atmosphere, and great territorial abundance: besides this, there shall be open to them those numerous sources of wealth arising from the depths of the sea and from the bowels of the earth, together with numerous flocks and herds, and a vastly increasing posterity. The blessings which thy father has received, and with which he has blessed thee, all his descendants being included in it to the remotest generations, shall exceed those actually enjoyed by Abraham and Isaac, thy progenitors and mine, who were especially distinguished by God. Those blessings shall outlast the everlasting hills, and be perpetuated through my descendants and thine. Thus shall he be signalized whom his brethren wickedly sold as a slave, and who is now infinitely elevated above them in temporal distinction, being the favourite minister of one of the greatest monarchs upon earth.'

This, I trust, will, upon the whole, help to render a portion of Scripture, universally admitted to be very obscure, sufficiently intelligible. I shall, however, close this chapter with Herder's remarks upon this important benediction, as, besides being ingenious, they are full of eloquence, a quality in which this writer eminently excels.

"So far as this blessing contains allusions to Rachel, and the early history of Joseph, I will not repeat the illustrations of it, which I have given elsewhere.* Here it will simply serve

* Briefe das studium der Theologie betreffend, Th. 1.

us as a map of the region which Joseph was to possess in Canaan for the two tribes of his posterity. The patriarch describes it in a picture of the life of Joseph. His branches spring up luxuriently over a fountain where the boughs reach over the wall. He is an invincible archer, whose arms and hands are only rendered the more active by the assault of the bravest enemies. He is crowned with the peculiar blessing of high mountains, where the heavens are expanded above and the sea spreads beneath, in which image the wish of the father aspires even to the heights of the primitive world. What, then, were these ancient mountain heights? Moses explains the matter in his benediction. 'He shall trample the nations even to the extremity of the land.' Ephraim, therefore, the mighty unicorn, with his paternal tribe, was to dwell, probably on the highest northern elevations of the country, on the skirts of Mount Lebanon. Here was Phiala, the fountain of the river Jordan, by which the fair fruit-tree was to be nourished, and here it might shoot its branches upon the wall, and beyond the wall or boundary of the land, and exhibit the active and untiring boldness for which the father of the tribe was renowned. Here they had the heavens above, and the sea stretching beneath; here the blessings of the everlasting hills, the mountains of the primeval world, from which were to be brought spices and precious things, as a diadem and an unction for the head of him who was crowned among his brethren. In this way, every particular of this pregnant benediction

becomes, not only consistent, but picturesque and local. As Lebanon, like a mountain of the primeval world, overlooks the land of Canaan, crowned with white, and lifts itself to the clouds; as the everlasting cedars, those trees which the Lord hath planted, stand upon it, and its deep valleys beneath are filled with vineyards around the numerous fountains which flow from them; so shall this tribe flourish fresh and lively as the vine upon Lebanon,* as a fruit tree by the fountains of water. The mountains abound in trees which yield odorous gums (from which the Greek name was taken), spices for the head of Joseph, balsams for the head of him that was crowned. The smell of Lebanon occurs in the Song of Solomon and the Prophets,† as a poetical expression for precious odours and spices. The pass of Hamath, in which Joseph is here placed, as the strongest and most expert archer, is the most important for the safety of the whole country, and, according to the figure employed by Moses, Ephraim and Manasseh were to guard it with the strength and vigour of a wild bullock. And who can deny the wisdom exhibited in these conceptions of the patriarch? The children of his Egyptian son he removed to the greatest distance from Egypt. Those who held this most difficult pass he furnished with all the blessings pertaining to royal dignity, bestowed upon them all the honours of heroism, and the

* Hosea xiv. 8.

† Hosea xiv. 7, Solomon's Song iv. 11. The flowers, the pastures, the fountains, the scenery of Lebanon, are in like manner praised in Nahum i. 4, Isaiah xl. 16, Sol. Song iv. 15, &c.

invocation of all good from the great and mighty God, the guardian of Israel upon his rocky pillow. There, indeed, he placed the chief reliance for the defence of the country. Below, in the south, a lion, the heroic Judah, was to be the watchman. On the northern frontier, the wild bullock was to stand in the passes of the mountains. And Benjamin, also, a tribe most nearly related by blood, was to be at the side of Joseph.”*

* *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, vol. ii. pp. 161—3.

CHAPTER XVII.

The benediction pronounced upon Benjamin.

WE come now to Jacob's last prophetic blessing.

Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf:
In the morning he shall devour the prey,
And at night he shall divide the spoil.

"This last tribe," says Dr. Hales, "is compared to a wolf for its ferocious and martial disposition, such as was evinced by their contests with the other tribes, in which, after two victories, they were almost exterminated."* Jacob compares several of his sons to animals, thus signifying the national character of their descendants. The lion, to which Judah is compared, characterizes the courage and unflinching determination of that tribe. The ass symbolizes the patience and laborious industry of the sons of Issachar. The serpent represents the cunning and foresight of the Danites; the hind, the freedom and prosperous condition of the tribe of Napthali. Benjamin is, lastly, compared to a ravenous wolf, to signify the sanguinary character of his posterity, who were not only a warlike, but likewise a cruel and profligate race, as may

* Judges xix. 20.

be seen in the twentieth chapter of Judges. They were noted alike for their courage and cruelty, for their licentiousness and want of social integrity as well as for their ferocity in battle, and could not, therefore, have been better represented than by a ravenous animal, notorious for its indomitable treachery, and for the fierce determination with which it assaults its prey in defiance of danger, when stimulated by hunger. For some time the Benjamites maintained a successful war against all the other tribes, overcoming their united forces in two sanguinary engagements, though their enemies were nearly sixteen times more numerous, and destroying more men of the combined tribes than they themselves numbered in their whole army.

Nothing more strongly characterizes the intractable disposition of this tribe than their conduct to the concubine or secondary wife of the Levite, as related in the nineteenth chapter of Judges. Here was an instance of licentiousness where the indulgence of the vilest passions was followed by murder; and although these were the acts of a few abandoned men, yet those acts were justified by the whole tribe, who waged a war, which ended in their almost entire extermination, in vindication of a crime that should have subjected the perpetrators of it to capital punishment. When the tribes of Israel sent a deputation to the sons of Benjamin, requiring that the criminals who had murdered the Levite's concubine should be delivered up to the demands of justice, instead of yielding to so just a requisition, they gathered their armies toge-

ther, and, in two desperate encounters, prevailed against the united armies of Israel, though, in the third conflict, they were grievously discomfited: then the arm of retribution reached them, for "the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men; all these drew the sword."* Their cities were set on fire, their fields laid waste; only a small remnant of six hundred men remained of this warlike tribe, and these were obliged to flee into the wilderness, though they were eventually restored to political independence through an act of the basest treachery, as may be seen in the concluding chapter of Judges. In the latter chapters of this book the character of the Benjamites is fully developed.

In the morning he shall devour the prey,
And at night he shall divide the spoil.

In this couplet two forms of parallelism are observable—the antithetical and constructive. "Morning" and "night" are the opposing terms, and their respective concomitants strengthen the force of the antithesis. The two actions, of devouring the prey and dividing the spoil, are most appropriately applied, as illustrative actions, the one to the morning, the other to the night; the former being the time when prey is usually devoured, and the latter, when spoil is divided. The extreme appositiveness in the cor-

* Judges xx, 35.

responding figures, and their admirable correctness of appropriation, as well as their relative application to the subject illustrated, deserve attention. They form together a concise but complete allegory. By the happy opposition of the images, they are mutually enhanced. Nothing, moreover, can well be more perfect than the constructive parallelism, the terms, "morning," "devour," and "prey," corresponding exactly, in their position in the first line of the couplet, with "night," "divide," and "spoil" in the second. By substituting *even* for *night* the correspondency of construction would be at once complete :

In the morning he shall devour the prey,
And at even he shall divide the spoil.

Here the parallelism is exact, and there is a euphony in the distribution of the emphatic words which imparts to each hemistich an effect scarcely exceeded by the most delicate metrical harmony. None of the passages quoted by Bishop Lowth or by Bishop Jebb are more perfect examples of constructive parallelism than this; and perhaps it would be difficult to find in the writings of any poet, not excepting the inspired bards of the sacred volume, a single couplet where so much is signified, and with such striking effect. Nothing morally favourable to Benjamin is suggested by the images in this benediction: they are indicative merely of personal qualifications; and how justly do they apply to the physical characteristics of that brave but inhuman tribe. Wolves, it is well known, are

the most cruel as well as ferocious of all the animal races: they will destroy, in mere wantonness, even when their appetites do not impel them to devour; and on this account they were consecrated by heathen superstition to the sanguinary god of battle. Like them, the Benjamites were rapacious, and delighted in blood.

I confess that the two last clauses of this benediction present difficulties of interpretation not easily surmounted; nor have I yet met with any exposition which affords me complete satisfaction. Bishop Sherlock, however, has taken a very ingenious and comprehensive view of them which well deserves attention.

"When," says that most learned and exemplary divine,* "Jacob professes to declare what shall befall his sons in the last times, is it hard to say what must be understood by the *morning* and *night*? The *natural morning* and *night* cannot possibly be understood here; and what other morning and night can you suppose intended, but the morning and night of the Jewish state? Thus, some Jewish interpreters, referred to by Bochart, understood the expression, *in the morning*, that is, *in the beginning of the government of the Israelites*; *in the evening*, that is, after the period of the Babylonish captivity. (See Hieroz, c. x. p. 828.) For this state is the subject of all Jacob's prophecy from one end to the other; consequently, it is here foretold of Benjamin, that he should continue to the very last times of the Jewish state. And

* Dissert. 3. Page 356.

this interpretation is confirmed by Moses' prophecy; for the prophecy of Moses is, in truth, an exposition of Jacob's prophecy.

The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him;
And the Lord shall cover him all the day long;
And he shall dwell between his shoulders.

“What is this ‘all the day long?’ You see how Benjamin is distinguished; he is to ‘dwell in safety,’ under ‘the cover of the Lord,’ and ‘between his shoulders all the day long.’ Does not this import the promise of a longer continuance to Benjamin than to the other tribes? And was it not most exactly fulfilled? Did not the tribe of Benjamin, adhering to that of Judah, (1 Kings, xii. 21—24) and forming one people under Judah as their head, run the same fortune, and continue in being with that tribe ‘till Shiloh came,’ long after the other ten tribes were no more a people?”

It is clear that this is rather an exposition of the prophecy of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 12) than of that delivered by Jacob (Gen. xlix. 27), the former of which appears to me to be an extension rather than an exposition, as Bishop Sherlock declares, of the latter; for, as I conceive, Jacob's benediction is entirely confined to the settlement of the tribe of Benjamin in the land of Canaan, beyond which he does not appear to have looked. The blessing of Moses evidently embraces their condition beyond this, and therefore he works out what the father of Joseph had left incomplete. Bishop Sherlock's interpretation is restricted to the two opposite ideas

of night and morning; he is altogether silent about devouring the prey and dividing the spoil, which I take to be nothing more than an extension of the preceding metaphors, expanding the whole passage into a short but agreeable allegory, representing the tribe of Benjamin, like the wolf rendered ferocious by hunger, as occupied day and night in its natural vocation of cruelty. It is a vivid picture of active depredation and unsated ferocity, a character, as has been already shown, especially befitting the tribe of Benjamin.

Stackhouse considers this prophecy to relate merely to the fierce and warlike character of Benjamin's posterity. These are his words: "Whether Jacob might foresee no merit or happiness extraordinary in the tribe of Benjamin, or that its being afterwards blended with the tribe of Judah, might make it partake of the same blessing; but so it was that he *contented himself with describing its fierce and warlike disposition*, which, like a ravenous wolf, would shed the blood of its enemies, and in the evening divide their spoil." *

It will be evident, that throughout the whole of these prophetic benedictions there exists a copious vein of magnificent poetry. The images are grand, the figures picturesque, the descriptions glowing, and the thoughts sublime. The distinguishing marks of the Hebrew poetical phraseology are manifest in every line. There is a specific beauty in almost every phrase.

* Stackhouse's History of the Bible. Vol. i. p. 346, fol. edit. 1742.

Besides these prophecies of Jacob, which were sufficiently verified in after times, the Jews ascribe some other works to him, namely, a treatise entitled, "The Ladder to Heaven," and another called, "Jacob's Testament," which Pope Gelasius classes among the Apocrypha; together with some forms of prayer, which the Jews use every night, and pretend that they were composed by him. As to the commendations which they so plentifully bestow upon this patriarch, these are justified, in a great measure, by the character which the author of Ecclesiasticus gives him (chap. xlv. 23.) And as the Mahomedans allow him not only to be a prophet, but the father, likewise, of all the prophets, except Job, Jethro, and Mahomet, so they believe that the royal dignity did not depart from his posterity until the times of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, and that from him the twelve tribes of the Jews descended, even as their own did from Ishmael.*

* See Calmet's Dictionary, art. Jacob.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Antiquity of the writings of Moses. The Book of Job. Works attributed to Moses. Sublimity of his Thanksgiving Ode.

THERE remain no written records so remote in time as the writings of Moses, who is admitted on all hands to be the most ancient author known, unless he was preceded by Job, of whom nothing authentic is handed down to us beyond what can be gathered from the book bearing his name, which not only leaves it very doubtful who Job was, but offers no decisive testimony with reference to the time in which he lived; neither is any direct proof furnished, by this remarkable production, as to who was its author. From the various allusions in it to modes of life with which the early Hebrews were familiar, and from the numerous forms of expression adopted out of the Hebrew writings which compose the Bible, it is evident that those writings were well known to the author of this magnificent poem. From this fact alone I should say that it was produced after the Pentateuch; and I know of no one so likely as Moses to have been the writer of it, he having sufficiently shown his competency in the thanksgiving ode, composed just

after the Israelites had passed the Red Sea, and in that divine poem embraced in the twenty-second chapter of Deuteronomy, a poem exhibiting the combined qualities of elegance, richness, copiousness of thought, condensation of language, masculine power, and surpassing sublimity; in which qualities it is only equalled, seldom excelled, by portions of the book of Job.

Besides the Pentateuch, the Jews ascribe to Moses several other compositions, and among them, eleven psalms, the ninetieth to the hundred and first; but they offer no proof of any value in corroboration of this statement. There has been likewise ascribed to the great Jewish lawgiver, an Apocalypse or Revelation of Moses, a lesser Genesis, the Ascension of Moses, the Assumption of Moses, the Testament of Moses, the Mysterious books of Moses, two of which productions are supposed to be quoted in the New Testament, namely, the Apocalypse of Moses and the Assumption of Moses. From the first, it is imagined that St. Paul quotes the following passage to the Galatians: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love."* And again,† "For neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." It is likewise supposed that St. Jude, where, in his epistle, he alludes to the contention concerning the body of Moses

* Chap. v. 6.

† Chap. vi. 15.

betwixt the devil and Michael the archangel, takes the account from the Assumption of Moses."* Of these supposed facts, however, no satisfactory proofs have been obtained.

The thanksgiving ode composed by Moses after having crossed the Red Sea, is, upon the whole, the most remarkable thing of its kind on record. It is the first regular ode which has come down to us duly authenticated from a very remote age. It is the earliest specimen existing of epic poetry, unless the Mahabarat, a celebrated Sanscrit poem, consisting of many thousand couplets, and maintained, by the Hindoos, to be of extraordinary antiquity, were written previously, which they assume to be the case. Their claim for this poem to so early an existence is not established by any thing like satisfactory proof, though there are strong reasons for supposing that such claim is not altogether without foundation. There can, however, be no doubt of the antiquity of the thanksgiving ode of Moses. It forms a part of the inspired history of the Pentateuch; and those proofs which establish the antiquity of the one, at the same time establish the antiquity of the other. So far as we know, therefore, this sublime song is the oldest poem of the epic character extant. "The author of the book of Wisdom," says Dr. Adam Clarke, "attributes it in a particular manner to the wisdom of God, and says on this occasion (chap. x. 21), 'For wisdom (that is,

* See Fabricious Apoc. Vet. Test.

divine wisdom) opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of them that cannot speak eloquent.' As if he had said, every person felt an interest in the great events which had taken place, and all laboured to give Jehovah that praise which was due to his name."

Upon the whole, I have no hesitation in affirming that this composition is unequalled by any thing of a similar kind. It appears to have been adapted for alternate recitation, and this was no doubt accompanied by the musical instruments then in use; and from the choruses it is clear that the whole was sung as a thanksgiving hymn to solemnize the great deliverance of the Israelites.

Of this poem Bishop Lowth says (twenty-seventh prælection), "The most perfect example which I know of that species of the sublime ode, possessing a sublimity dependant wholly upon the greatness of the conceptions and the dignity of the language, without any peculiar excellence in the form and arrangement, is the thanksgiving ode of Moses, composed after passing the Red Sea. Through every part of this poem the most perfect plainness and simplicity is maintained; there is nothing artificial, nothing laboured, either in respect to method or invention. Every part of it breathes the spirit of nature, and of passion; joy, admiration, and love, united with piety and devotion, burst forth spontaneously in their native colours. A miracle of the most interesting nature to the Israelites is displayed. The sea divides, and the waters are raised into

vast heaps on either side while they pass over; but their enemies, in attempting to pursue, are overwhelmed by the reflux of the waves. These circumstances are all expressed in language suitable to the emotions which they produced—abrupt, fervid, concise, animated, with a frequent repetition of the same sentiments.” “We behold the passions struggling for vent, labouring with a copiousness of thought and a poverty of expression. To take a strict account of the sublimity of this ode would be to repeat the whole. I will only remark one quality, which is indeed congenial to all the poetry of the Hebrews, but in this poem is more than usually predominant, I mean that brevity of diction which is so conducive to sublimity of style. Diffuse and exuberant expression generally detracts from the force of the sentiment, as in the human body excessive corpulency is generally inconsistent with health and vigour. The Hebrews, if we contemplate any of their compositions as a whole, may be deemed full and copious; but if we consider only the constituent parts of any production, they will be found sparing in words, concise, and energetic. They amplify by diversifying, by repeating, and sometimes by adding to the subject; therefore it happens that it is frequently, on the whole, treated rather diffusely, but still, every particular sentence is concise and nervous in itself. Thus it happens, in general, that neither copiousness nor vigour is wanting. This brevity of style is in some measure to be attributed to the genius of the lan-

guage, and in some measure to the nature of Hebrew verse. The most literal versions, therefore, commonly fail in this respect; and consequently still less is to be expected from any poetical translations or imitations whatever."*

In spite of what Bishop Lowth calls the poverty of the language, it possesses uncommon force of expression, and exhibits the native dignity of the thought to the greatest possible advantage, placing it before the mind in its frequently vast and imposing amplitude, enhancing it by the massive Doric vesture in which it arrays it, rather than concealing its magnificent proportions by a profusion of Corinthian drapery. Every sentiment of this ode is extremely elevated, displaying at once a healthiness and vigour which show it to be the offspring of no ordinary mind. The whole composition is nevertheless singularly simple, every image being in an uncommon degree plain, appropriate, and intelligible. There is a holy fervour pervading it that strongly marks the exalted feeling under which it was composed. It breathes a spirit of the purest piety and most glowing gratitude, at the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites and the destruction of their enemies, at a moment when the former were under the sorest apprehension of being overwhelmed by the mighty host which followed them from Egypt, headed by its king, in order to accomplish their overthrow. In truth, the divine mercy and justice were as signally displayed in

* Twenty-seventh Prælection.

the preservation of Jacob's posterity from the avenging sword of Pharaoh, as they had previously been in their protection from that of the destroying angel, who rendered every mother in Egypt a mourner, from the consort of the sovereign to the wife of the slave. These events are sublimely celebrated in this divine song. It is full of exquisite poetry, though the art is little evident except in its distribution for recitation or singing, where certain repetitions occur, these indicating how it was performed by the vast congregation of Israel upon the solemn occasion for which Moses composed it. There is not an unintelligible phrase throughout the whole poem; every image is so obvious and so happily illustrative, and the metaphors employed are so judiciously concurrent with the general sense, so exquisitely appropriate to the peculiar frame and texture of the passages in which they are introduced, that the most superficial reader can hardly fail to be impressed with their clear and beautiful congruity.

The manner in which this ode was sung we may learn from Bishop Lowth's nineteenth Prælection. "It is evident," he says, "from many examples, that the sacred hymns were alternately sung by opposite choirs,* and that the one choir usually performed the hymn itself while the other sang a particular distich, which was regularly interposed at stated intervals, either of the nature of the prosm or epode of the Greeks. In this manner we learn that

* See Nehem. xii. 24, 31, 38, 40; and the title of Psalm lxxxviii.

Moses with the Israelites chanted the ode at the Red Sea ; for “ Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her with timbrels and with dances, and Miriam answered them,” that is, she and the women sang the response to the chorus of men.*

Sing to Jehovah, for he is very greatly exalted ;
The horse and the rider he hath cast into the sea.

It was the opinion of Dr. Geddes that the men repeated every single stanza after Moses, much in the same manner as the first four divisions of the Litany are repeated in our Church, and that the women did precisely the same after Miriam.

* Exod. xv. 20, 21.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Thanksgiving Ode considered, from verse 1—6.

I SHALL now endeavour to show how a critical examination of this inimitable song will justify the commendations passed upon it in the last chapter. The poem is extremely fine, even as given by our translators, with whose version Lowth's rendering does not exactly agree:—

I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

It is in the very simplicity of this exordium that the sublimity consists. The poet at once plunges into the subject of his song—Jehovah's triumph and the Israelites' deliverance. The subject, being of itself sufficiently grand, did not require the aid of metaphor or any other subsidiary embellishment to elevate it. Nothing more than the bare expression of God's omnipotence was required to give due sublimity to the opening couplet. The deliverance of his chosen people was not accomplished by the overthrow of a multitude of soldiers merely, but of horses and horsemen—not only by the destruction of the armies of Egypt, but of its king and its nobles. The picture of desolation is rendered

much more copious, and at the same time much more imposing, by the mention of horses as well as of men, all the splendid and formidable array of an equestrian army occurring at once to the mind, overwhelmed by an almighty arm in the proud magnificence of their strength.

In singing this sacred song the proemial couplet was no doubt repeated at certain intervals.* Dr. Kennicott divides the ode into four parts, and supposes the opening lines to have been repeated at the end of each part, which I think probable. There is great animation in this exordium, which is at once full of pious fervour and holy joy. The author begins by giving glory to the Omnipotent Jehovah, who, in behalf of his chosen people, had mercifully triumphed over the enemies of Israel, from whom they were unable to accomplish their own deliverance. The humility of the man thus beautifully harmonizes, though in such immediate contrast, with the stupendous sublimity of the subject.

Next follows a burst of animated reliance upon the great Deliverer, showing, at the same time, the utter dependance of man and the absolute supremacy of God.

The Lord is my strength and song,
And he is become my salvation.

A consequential relation of thoughts is here presented, apparently under a mere conjunction of generalities. The Lord was his strength,

* See page 259.

and therefore a fitting subject to be praised in sacred song. He had just signalized his superabounding and providential mercy towards the posterity of Jacob by "becoming their salvation" from the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh, and consequently claimed to be the theme of their thanksgiving for whom he had wrought such a miraculous deliverance.

The word translated "Lord" in this passage is not Jehovah, but Jah, "as if," says Parkhurst, "by abbreviation. It signifies the essence—He who is, simply, absolutely, and independently." "Our blessed Lord solemnly claims to himself what is intended in this divine name, Jah; (John viii. 58) Before Abraham was, I AM; not I WAS, but I AM, plainly intimating his divine eternal existence."* Moses therefore, possibly, under the influence of the prophetic spirit, alluded by inference to the benign Redeemer of man, which assumption, the words, "he became my salvation," appear to justify. In this view there will be found a vast deal expressed in the short distich now under notice, besides its affording a collateral ratification of the great Christian doctrine of redemption through Christ, who "died for our sins and rose again for our justification;" and of whom an old poet† has quaintly but touchingly said—

Go then, my soul, and pass the common bounds
Of passion, go and kneel before his wounds;
Go, touch them with thy lips; thou need'st not fear,
They will not bleed afresh though thou be there:

* See Dr. A. Clarke's note.

† Francis Quarles.

But if they do, that very blood thou spilt,
Believe't, will plead thy pardon, not thy guilt.

I am aware that the allusion to the Redeemer, which strikes me to be traceable in this passage, is not generally noticed by commentators. Dr. Hales, however, speaking of this triumphal ode, says, "It is a sublime prophecy, foretelling the powerful effect of this tremendous judgment on the neighbouring nations of Edom, Moab, Palestine, and Canaan, the future settlement of the Israelites in the promised land, the erection of the temple and sanctuary on Mount Sion, and the perpetuity of the dominion and worship of God."

It is certain the promise of a Saviour, who should absolve man from the dominion of sin, under which the tempter seduced him in paradise, was the expectation of the patriarchal ages, and continued up to the period of the Saviour's appearance upon earth, though the later Jews had corrupted the belief of their forefathers, by relying with greater earnestness of faith upon the glosses of their scribes and the traditions of their elders, which taught that the Messiah would come into the world to establish a temporal dominion merely, and elevate the Jewish people in political eminence above the ambitious Romans and every other nation.

The expectation of the promised deliverer was cherished among the earlier patriarchs as "an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast:" and though their notions of him might have been vague and undefined, it is manifest that those notions were sufficiently definite to cause Abra-

ham's faith to be imputed to him for righteousness, and to establish his hopes of a resurrection to eternal life through him whose merits alone can cancel the primeval malediction. We cannot wonder, then, that this hope should be traced in the earliest prophetic aspirations which the sacred writings have recorded. That Jacob upon his death-bed should have referred to this divine expectation, when he was pouring out upon his sons the last inspirations of the spirit of prophecy, is an event so natural that we can have no cause for surprise when we trace an allusion to this blessed doctrine in his dying words. And when Moses, to whom it must of course have been alike familiar, was offering up his thanksgiving for a great deliverance, what so natural as that he should associate the idea of that far greater deliverance, which has ruptured the bonds of eternal death and brought life and immortality to light. He was addressing the deliverer of the Israelites in devout song; and was not this a fitting opportunity to hail him likewise as the common deliverer of mankind? He addresses him as his Saviour:—

The Lord is my strength and song,
And he is become my salvation (or my Saviour);
He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation,
My father's God, and I will exalt him.

How fine is the gradation in these two latter lines.

He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation,

that is, I will prepare him a place fit to be the

habitation of his holiness; I will consecrate to him a visible temple made with hands; I will erect a tabernacle, which the divine presence shall occupy.

During the residence of the Israelites in the land of Goshen, especially under the tyranny of the latter Pharoah, who "knew not Joseph," and who had been so awfully "baptized unto death" in the Red Sea, it is more than probable that the simple worship of their fathers had been neglected. We may fairly enough suppose that a fanatical heathen and a fierce despot, teeming with the desire, and armed with the power, to suppress a religion which humbled his gods and repudiated those revolting rites by which they were invoked and propitiated, would not allow dependants, whom he had reduced to a state of odious slavery, to have an established place of worship. The history of the Israelites at this period shows that they were not only socially but morally debased. Their whole conduct, from the time of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage to their final settlement in the land of Canaan, exhibits them as a recreant, mean-spirited, unworthy race, continually murmuring against their leaders, desiring to return to their captivity, frequently indulging in the grossest sensuality and adopting the idolatrous practices of the heathen. It is evident from all this that religion had been grievously neglected, and a large portion of them had no doubt almost forgotten the worship of the true God; therefore it was that Moses determined to prepare him an habitation in which the primitive worship

should be restored, where communion might be daily held with him, where he might be daily praised, and where, moreover, a perpetual remembrance should be kept up of that divine promise immediately succeeding the transgression in paradise, in the fulfilment of which the fetters of sin shall be eventually snapped, and the privileges of adopted sons bestowed upon all who come unto God through faith in the ransom of Christ's atoning blood.

My fathers' God, and I will exalt him,

that is, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, to whom the promise was made, that "in their seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." He is not simply the God of the universe, who made heaven and earth, and sustains them in due harmony and order by his omnipotent sovereignty, but he is likewise that-merciful God who has undertaken man's ransom from the doom of the law—that beneficent being who promised to the fathers of Israel the Redeemer who was to proceed, in the flesh, from their seed. 'I will therefore magnify him!' exclaims the inspired bard 'in this my song, which shall endure throughout all ages, and thus be an everlasting testimony of his greatness.'

Here is an outbreak of devotion so appropriately and so felicitously introduced, that we are most solemnly impressed by it. The heart of the worshipper seems laid open before us, and we involuntarily unite with him in his song of thanksgiving. Moreover, the prophetic afflatus is now evidently upon the poet, who foresees

that besides the tabernacle in the wilderness a temple shall be erected to God's worship worthy of his name, and to commemorate the signal displays of his mercy; that his church shall be established in remote generations, against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail," for it shall last, in spite of the mimic thunders that may burst around its battlements, "so long as the sun and moon endureth;" a church, "the foundation whereof standeth sure, whose builder and maker is God;" its "walls shall be called salvation, and its gates praise."

The gradational parallelism in the second distich last quoted, though not so striking as in some other passages, is nevertheless too evident to be overlooked. The parallel terms rise with a beautiful gradation of force: "He is my God," "my fathers' God." He is not only my God, the God of the Israelites, who has rescued them from Egyptian bondage, but the God of our fathers, in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed—the merciful deliverer of mankind. This advance in the sense is very striking; and observe how much is implied by the mere poetical distribution of the clauses. The mind is at once carried to the implied sense, by the intimation given that a higher meaning is to be sought in the parallel phrases: He is therefore more than my deliverer—not only the Saviour of the sons of Israel, but of the whole human race, as he promised to my progenitor, the righteous Abraham, and his immediate descendants.

"I will prepare him an habitation," and "I

will exalt him." Here, again, the gradational force in the sense is plain. To prepare him an habitation without establishing a form of worship would have been altogether a vain thing; Moses, therefore, not only declares that a temple shall be raised to him, but that there he shall be duly honoured, and his name adored; there his praises shall be magnified with thanksgivings, with prayers, and oblations; there shall be rendered to him the homage due unto his name; "prayer shall be made to him continually, and daily shall he be praised."

The Lord is a man of war,
The Lord is his name.

"A man of war" is the literal rendering of the Hebrew; but it certainly sounds harsh to an English ear applied to Jehovah, as it brings him down to the level of a mere mortal hero. In the original this impression is not given; there we see only the judicial attribute of the Deity represented. He is a being of superlative power, which no mortal armies can withstand, neither could the hosts of Seraphim when at their head Lucifer fell from a state of the most perfect fruition to a doom of everlasting shame and woe.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!*

The single arm of the Omnipotent discomfited his hosts, driving them over the battlements of heaven into the bottomless pit, where he hath

* Isaiah xiv. 12.

“reserved them in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” The ranks of Pharoah he as completely overthrew whilst the shouts of contemplated triumph were upon their tongues, hurrying them unexpectedly to their doom, and “dashing them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Dr. Kennicott, whose version of this ode is very beautiful, renders the two hemistichs just quoted—

Jehovah is mighty in battle !
Jehovah is his name !

“Mighty in battle” is certainly a more poetical reading than “man of war,” and gives a truer sense: it gets rid of a mean comparison, at the same time developing the attribute of Almighty power merely, in language at once simple, forcible, and comprehensive. “Man of war” is a Hebrew idiom, distinguishing the character rather than the occupation, expressing great bravery and the combined attributes of heroism, as “a man of words,” applied in scripture to Solomon, is a phrase indicative of his extraordinary wisdom and eloquence. The distich is thus paraphrased by Bishop Patrick: “There is none can stand before the Lord, who hath perfectly subdued our enemies and faithfully fulfilled his promises to his servants.” There is no obscurity in this passage needing a paraphrase to expound it, for the sense is perfectly clear, though it must be obvious that the rendering of Kennicott gives additional expression to the second clause, upon which Mr. Lock very judiciously observes,

“ hereby is meant that God hath performed that which his name, Jehovah, imports; namely, he hath caused that to be which he promised should come to pass.” (Chap. vi. 3.)

There is vast significancy in this brief hemistich—

Jehovah is his name;

as if Moses had said, ‘ I cannot characterize the mighty Deliverer of myself and of the Israelites so well as by his name Jehovah—that ineffable and mysterious designation of the eternal God-head, which implies all that is great and good—all that is wise and powerful—all that is infinite and incomprehensible.

“ The Jewish cabalists,” says Calmet,* “ have refined very much on the name Jehovah. They remark, for example, that in Genesis, Moses calls God ELOHIM, while speaking of the creation of the world; but after he had finished the creation, he calls him Jehovah, meaning, say they, that in the beginning God seemed, in some sort, imperfect, while producing beings by parts; but after he had concluded his work, he took the name of Jehovah, which is a name of infinite perfection. To this they refer the words (Deut. xxxii. 4,) ‘ The work of the rock is perfect,’ or rather, ‘ the work of God, this almighty rock, is perfect.’

“ The letters which compose this adorable name abound with mysteries. Jod, the first letter, denotes *the thought*, the idea of God;

* Dictionary of the Bible, art. Jehovah.

to this light no man can approach; the eye of man hath not seen, nor the mind of man comprehended it; of this Job spoke, 'Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living,' &c. The 'He,' the last of the four letters, discovers the unity of God and the Creator. From thence issue the four rivers of Paradise, that is, the four majesties of God, which the Jews call Shechinah.

"This name of God includes all things. He who pronounces it shakes heaven and earth, and inspires the very angels with terror. A sovereign authority resides in this name; it governs the world; other names and surnames of the Deity are ranged about it, like officers and soldiers about their king and general; from this they receive their orders, and this they obey. This is the fountain of graces and blessings; the channels through which God's mercies are conveyed to men. He who knew all the mysteries of God's name, would be ignorant of nothing in all the ways of his justice and providence."

Attaching then, as the Jews evidently did, from the earliest period of their history, such a mysterious signification and such unbounded efficacy to the name of Jehovah, how expressive is the latter line of the distich last quoted, summing up in that one word all that can be either said or imagined of the divine perfections.

Pharoah's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea :
His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.
The depths have covered them :
They sank into the bottom as a stone.

The war-chariots employed in the Egyptian army were supposed to be drawn each by four horses. "Scripture," says Calmet, "speaks of two sorts of chariots, one for princes and generals to ride in, the other to break the enemy's battalions, by rushing in among them, being armed with iron, which made terrible havoc. The most ancient chariots of war we find mentioned, are Pharoah's, which were overthrown in the Red Sea." (Exod. xv. 7.)

That the chariots employed in war in these early times were very numerous, may be gathered from the Jewish history. Sisera, general of Jabin, king of Hazor, who was vanquished by Barak, had nine hundred chariots of iron (see Judges iv. 3.) The Philistines, in their war against Saul, had thirty thousand chariots (see 1 Sam. xiii. 5), though Houbigant and other commentators, conceiving this to be an impossible number, read, upon the authority of Bochart, three thousand chariots. We may readily conceive, therefore, that a monarch possessing such resources as Pharoah, then the most wealthy and powerful monarch of his age, must have had a vast number of these engines of war, at that time commonly used wherever extensive wars were carried on. Surely if Jabin, a very inferior potentate, in little more than a century and a half from this period had nine hundred war-chariots of iron, we may fairly imagine that so potent a sovereign as Pharoah must have had a much greater number, and the terror with which the hosts of the Israelites were inspired, when

they beheld their pursuers urging forward these formidable engines of death, fully bears out this presumption. All these, together with the chief nobles and warriors who proudly rode in them, the horses which drew them, and the whole multitude of foot soldiers composing Pharoah's army, as well as all their warlike appendages, were cast into the sea, to the bottom of which they sank, and were covered by the recoiling waters.

There is a minuteness of detail in the two distichs relating this just consummation of almighty vengeance, which conveys a deep impression of the extent of the destruction produced by that terrible visitation; while the solemn close of the description is, if possible, still more fearfully impressive. The sudden overthrow of such a mighty host, among whom was a powerful king, together with his whole court, his nobles and officers—all being overwhelmed in the depths of the Red Sea, without a moment's warning—was an event in the last degree awful, and it is sublimely expressed in the poem. The line—

They sank into the bottom as a stone,

beautifully represents their utter destruction. They were so completely plunged into the depths of the sea, that they could not rise to the surface, being sucked into the mud, or, encumbered by their heavy arms, were prevented from floating. Dr. Kennicott has given the last of these two couplets with singular felicity; he reads—

The depths have covered them, they went down
(They sank) to the bottom as a stone.

This renders the parallelism much more complete, at the same time that it encreases the emphasis of the description. It will be observed that every member of this sentence is but an echo of the same thought heightened in force.

The depths have covered them.

Here every thing is told that the subject really needed, but how exquisitely is the picture strengthened by the repetitions—"they went down," "they sank"—closing with a plain, nay, with a homely, but nevertheless most forcible and significant comparison. See how the terms strengthen;—first, the water only covers them—here is expressed the incipient action of sinking; next, they descend, they are exhibited in the direct act of sinking, their rapid gravitation towards the bottom; the terms which then follow show the completion of the act—they are drowned—they lie at the bottom like a stone—the divine retribution is complete.

The couplet which precedes this is given by Kennicott precisely as we find it in the common version. It is only a more general description of what is detailed in the two subsequent clauses; but the parallelism is very strictly preserved. In the first line, the chariots and the host are mentioned as being cast into the sea; here the description is indefinite—they might be cast into the sea without being drowned, still this

indication of what followed prepares the mind for the coming catastrophe—

His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

In this line the whole sum of devastation and ruin is at once disclosed—his chosen captains, too, are not only cast into, but *drowned* in the Red Sea; the word also implying that the entire host mentioned in the preceding line were likewise drowned. There is a progressive beauty in every clause of this eloquent and effective passage.

CHAPTER XX.

*Consideration of the Thanksgiving Ode continued, from
verse 6—11.*

THE next pair of couplets, which follow those noticed in the last chapter, are full of grandeur—

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power :
Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.
And in the greatness of thine excellency,
Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee.

The first of these distichs offers a favourable example of the common gradational parallelism. The opening members of both lines are mere repetitions, though admirably adapted to dignify the sense ; and the latter members are, to a certain extent, exegetical the one of the other. The divine power was manifested in “dashing in pieces the enemy :” the latter consequently, namely the destruction of the enemy, signalized the former, namely the divine power. This apposition of the thoughts, and progressive elevation of the subject, are eminently happy specimens of epic grandeur.

“Thy right hand.” This alludes to God’s omnipotence. The right hand, being naturally the strongest because most employed, is an apt metaphor, representing the highest degree of

power. It is a favourite figure with the Hebrew writers, being unquestionably a very elegant one, and is frequently used by the sweet Psalmist of Israel. The repetition of the term, as it is exceedingly significative, gives additional emphasis to the passage, in combination with the kindred specifications which follow in each clause. The description in the first is general, in the second, specific, and the repeated phrase is equally applicable to both lines. The image appears to be amplified by this repetition, borrowing a hue of force from the more awful and imposing picture to which it is allied in the concluding member of the second line.

And in the greatness of thine excellency.

Patrick has some good observations on this clause. "All words being too low to declare the greatness of God's power, which appeared in the overthrow of the Egyptians, he endeavours to rise higher and higher in his expressions, to show how much he admired it."*

It is certainly true that the expressions do rise considerably in dignity as the inspired bard proceeds, as if, in proportion as he warmed with the fire of his subject, sublimer phrases rose to his mind, and he became animated with a more exalted fervour. He loses no opportunity of magnifying the divine attributes, but continues to dwell upon them, as the means of his and of his country's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

* See Patrick's note on the passage.

Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee.

This refers to Pharoah's rebellion against God, in pursuing his people Israel, after the numerous warnings which he had already received that they were under the divine protection; for this had been sufficiently proved to him by repeated miracles wrought for their deliverance. He therefore placed himself in daring opposition to the will of heaven, and consequently, at length provoked the terrible exercise of that omnipotency which he had so often and so wantonly defied.

I think Kennicott has given additional force to the last line, by adopting the present instead of a past tense, as it expresses the Almighty power, not only as it was exhibited in the one stupendous manifestation, when Pharoah and his hosts were the victims of its potency, but in its general and universal supremacy. He translates the line, to my feeling, with much judgment:—

And in the greatness of thine excellency,
Thou overthrowest them that rise against thee.

Here is a general, not a specific, declaration of omnipotent agency, and I think this much better accords with the simple dignity and elevation of the passage than as our translators have given it. Isaiah, in allusion to this signal deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian tyranny, has a truly magnificent passage:* “Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying—

* Chap. lxiii. 11—14.

Where is he that brought them up out of the sea
 With the shepherd of his flock ?
 Where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him ?
 That led them by the right-hand of Moses with his glorious arm ?
 Dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name ?
 That led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness,
 That they should not stumble ?
 As a beast goeth down into the valley,
 The spirit of the Lord caused him to rest :
 So didst thou lead thy people to make thyself a glorious name."

Here is a beautiful poetical commentary upon the greatest deliverance which history has recorded, save that prophesied in Eden and consummated by Christ.

Thou sentest forth thy wrath,
 Which consumed them as stubble :
 And with the blast of thy nostrils
 The waters were gathered together :
 The floods stood upright as an heap,
 And the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

A very slight alteration would greatly improve this passage, without in the remotest degree interfering with the sense. How much better would it read thus :—

Thou sentest forth thy wrath ;—
 It consumed them as stubble.
 With the blast of thy nostrils
 The waters were gathered together :
 The floods stood upright as an heap,
 And the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

By simply exchanging *it* for *which*, and leaving out the *and* in the third line, a flow and compactness is given to the whole passage, which, as first quoted, is certainly wanting to it in a great degree. The whole of this quotation is extremely grand—

Thou sentest forth thy wrath.

Like a dreadful projectile, thou didst direct thy wrath against the foes of Israel, scattering desolation and death. It quitted the pillar of fire, which guided the Israelites on their journey toward the wilderness, like a flash of lightning, or like the desolating blast of the desert; and as either withers the grass, or shrinks up the standing corn, so did they fall prostrate before it, and perished under the stroke of Almighty vengeance. Stubble is a thing at once useless and easily consumed, so were the heathen armies of the Egyptian despot worthless in the estimation of him, in whose eyes the wicked are as dross, and who has sufficiently proved that beneath the might of his arm they are as chaff before the wind.

And with the blast of thy nostrils.

Nothing can be grander than the image here employed. It signifies, that the gathering together of the mighty waters was an immediate act of divine power: the poet, therefore, represents the Deity as actually emitting from his nostrils the wind, which produced an effect never before, nor since, witnessed by man. The figure, too, sustains in the imagination the idea of Almighty wrath previously expressed—the inflated nostril, from which the blast of God’s vengeance was ejected, conveying a distinct and emphatic notion of active anger. It is a singularly forcible picture, heaping upon the plastic imagination a crowd of vigorous ideas, rising out of, and fructifying from, this single but prolific root. We seem to have the whole process of sublime destruction brought at once before the mind by

a waving, as it were, of the poet's mystical wand.

The waters were gathered together,
The floods stood upright as an heap,
And the depths were congealed.

Here is a beautiful gradation of sense. The waters were not only raised up, like a wall, on the right hand and on the left, but were consolidated at the same moment; they were gathered together, and thus fixed, for the time, in a condition so contrary to their natural tendency, that the depths of the sea were disclosed, and a path left for "the ransomed to pass over." The waters were arrested in their channel, and ceased to flow, being actually congealed, but recoiled upon the pursuing host, who had dared to oppose the authority of the Most High. The whole description is eminently picturesque. I know nothing in ancient or modern poetry that, for force of impression, can surpass the line—

And the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

The eighth verse of the chapter, which closes with this beautiful line, is thus paraphrased by Bishop Patrick. "Thou didst but give the command, and by a vehement wind the waters of the sea were divided and heaped up, so that they swelled into little hills, and were compact, like a wall, which was upheld from falling down until the people passed through the midst of the sea."

The writer of the Wisdom of Solomon,* alluding to this extraordinary miracle, says:

* Chap. xix. 7—9.

“And where water stood before, dry land appeared; and out of the Red Sea a way without impediment; and out of the violent stream, a green field: wherethrough all the people went that were defended with thy hand, O God, seeing thy marvellous strange wonders. For they went at large like horses, and leaped like lambs, praising thee, O Lord, who hadst delivered them.” And again,* “She,” that is, Wisdom—of course divine wisdom—“brought them through the Red Sea, and led them through much water; but she drowned their enemies, and cast them up out of the bottom of the deep. Therefore the righteous spoiled the ungodly, and praised thy holy name, O Lord, and magnified with one accord thine hand that fought for them. For Wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of them that cannot speak eloquent.” These passages are excellent commentaries on the parallel texts of Moses’ thanksgiving ode now under our notice.

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil :
My lust shall be satisfied upon them,
I will draw my sword,
My hand shall destroy them.

“The display of the fury and threats of the enemy,” says Bishop Lowth,† “by which Moses finely exaggerates the horror of their unexpected ruin, is wonderfully sublime.” The abrupt expressions, gradually increasing in force, till they end in a complete climax, are admirably descriptive of the rage by which Pharaoh was at this

* Chap. x. 18—21.

† Seventeenth Prælection.

moment overcome at the escape of his captives. Nothing, moreover, can more effectually portray the extreme confidence of the tyrant in his own power than the lines just quoted. He is not contented with declaring his intention to pursue the Israelites, but assumes at once the impossibility of failure in overtaking them and accomplishing their destruction. The haughty monarch, having been accustomed to look upon them as a race of impotent bondmen, assumes the fierce tone of the despot, and threatens the instant extermination of his rebellious dependants. See in what a fine poetical sequence the sense rises. The vindictive tyrant declares that he will first pursue the Israelites, next that he will overtake them, then that the whole weight of his vengeance shall fall upon them; for he would set his multitudinous army in array against and utterly exterminate the fugitives. How clearly is the character of this regal oppressor projected to our view in these few expressive lines: we see him before us vividly pictured in all the haughty vindictiveness of his implacable nature, without a single qualifying virtue. What can be more expressive than the line,

My lust shall be satisfied upon them !

It represents such an intense desire of vengeance, such indomitable ferocity, such sanguinary savageness of purpose. It expresses no common wish to inflict summary punishment upon a fugitive people who had quitted his dominions in obedience to the divine summons,

but a ruthless determination to destroy them utterly, to give them up to the excited fury of his soldiers, trained to slaughter, and ready to exercise the worst attributes of their unholy calling. Nothing short of that could appease his truculent desire of revenge. But they were protected from the sword of the destroyer by that arm of might which "binds kings in chains and nobles with links of iron."

Nothing can more strongly show the miserable state of servitude to which the Israelites had been reduced in Egypt, than the confidence with which Pharaoh speaks of overtaking and destroying so vast a multitude. Under any circumstances, an assemblage of more than six hundred thousand fighting men, in the full vigour of health and of strength, for there was not a sick man among them, however they might have been morally depressed under a long and degrading condition of bondage in a foreign land, must have presented formidable obstacles to the accomplishment of the Egyptian king's revenge. But they had so patiently submitted to his tyranny, in consequence of their spirits being broken by the severity of their captivity and their utter despair of deliverance, that he considered them morally, if not physically, incapable of opposing his disciplined troops and the numerous armed chariots, by which he was accompanied. But the Lord fought for Israel, and the Egyptian's vain boast was soon turned into cries of terror.

Lowth's version of this passage I do not think

so good as the common reading. He has followed Dr. Kennicott; and though the difference from the authorized translation is slight, it is nevertheless important; in my judgment, Lowth's and Kennicott's rendering is much less forcible, and certainly less literal:—

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake;
I will divide the spoil, *my soul* shall be satisfied;
I will draw the sword, my hand shall destroy them.

My soul does not, I think, convey the poet's meaning in this place: it is his vehement desire of vengeance which he determines shall be satisfied, and which I think is very happily expressed by the word *lust*, for that term may be as justly applied to ardent desire of any kind as to the solicitations of mere animal appetite, and can only be understood in the former sense in the middle clause: the whole context sufficiently shows this; I cannot say, therefore, I approve of the fastidiousness that would substitute a less effective term in order to avoid the possibility of an equivocal interpretation, which could only be made by the most blinded understanding. Besides, "my soul shall be satisfied" is not a satisfactory phrase—it is vague and indeterminate; whereas, that used by our translators is not only readily intelligible, but is loaded, so to speak, with a volume of meaning. I should be sorry to sacrifice the oftentimes homely yet extreme vigour of the original to an overweaning delicacy of refinement. The gain in such a case is a real loss: I would therefore willingly

wave it, and not be contented to take the worse for the better.

Thou didst blow with thy wind—
The sea covered them :
They sank as lead in the mighty waters.

Nothing, as I have said, can be finer than the fierce exultation expressed by Pharoah in the passage previously quoted, setting forth that tyrant's determination to destroy the whole of Jacob's posterity, who, in obedience to the divine command, had quitted a state of bondage, in order to enter upon an inheritance promised to their fathers, in a land of such plenty, as to be characterized, by the inspired historian, as flowing with milk and honey. Observe the judicious contrast between that and the passage quoted above. Exultation is immediately succeeded by the most complete destruction. The vociferations of rage and the loud menaces of presumed authority, are followed by "lamentations and mourning and woe." They who so lately gave way to rejoicing at contemplating the annihilation of an unoffending people, who were marching from slavery to freedom, are themselves suddenly involved in ruin as complete as they anticipated casting upon the long-injured but unresisting Israelites. How emphatically is this ruin represented in every part of the poem where it is introduced.

Thou didst blow with *thy* wind.

It was a wind raised by the divine intervention, not the ordinary operation of nature.

It was God's wind distinctly and specially, such a wind as caused the waters to divide, to remain for a while stationary,—in fact, to be congealed in the heart of the sea. It was not a common action of the elements, but a wind immediately and expressly directed to its issues by the Divinity. Here is a distinction worthy of observation. This was a something out of the usual course of natural events;—it was the direct result of a providential agency. The wind blew, the sea was raised like a wall on either side as the Israelites passed over; and being followed by their pursuers, the waves recoiled upon these fierce oppressors, who

Sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Can any thing more aptly represent the suddenness and completeness of their overthrow than this short passage? It was instantaneous and final. They sank like lead, which, from its great weight, descends to the bottom with the utmost precipitation. So did Pharoah and his mighty host, his chariots and his horsemen. They had neither time for repentance nor escape, but reaped that dreadful harvest of destruction which they were preparing with such fiendish exultation for the unoffending seed of Abraham. They were overwhelmed in the depths of the sea. What a sudden and terrible death! This is, in truth, a subject to call our thoughts home to our own state, and who but must concur with the great moralist:—*

* Young, see Night ii.

Who venerate themselves, the world despise :
For what, gay friend, is this escutcheon'd world,
Which hangs out death in one eternal night?—
A night that glooms us in the noontide ray,
And wraps our thoughts, at banquets, in the shroud.
Life's little stage is a small eminence,
Inch-high above the grave—that home of man,
Where dwells the multitude: we gaze around,
We read their monuments, we sigh ; and while
We sigh, we sink, and are what we deplored ;
Lamenting or lamented, all our lot !

CHAPTER XXI.

Thanksgiving Ode continued, from verse 11—14.

THE reflections which closed the last chapter, though sad, are of the highest interest to humanity; well, therefore, might the Hebrew bard exclaim, under the transports of awakened gratitude, for so signal a deliverance from threatened destruction—

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like thee, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

In this triplet the vast superiority of the true God is maintained over the artificial gods of Egypt, and those animal and reptile divinities to which that besotted people offered adoration. A contrast is presented between the omnipotence of the former and the utter impotence of the latter: "We have already seen that all the Egyptian gods, or the objects of Egyptian idolatry, were confounded and rendered completely despicable by the ten plagues, which appear to have been directed principally against them. Here the people of God exult over them afresh. 'Who among these gods is like unto THEE?

They can neither save nor destroy: THOU dost both in the most signal manner.' '*

Waterland translates the first line of this triplet, and is followed by many other commentators—

Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the mighty ones?

But I do not think that this reading can be admitted, and for this reason: the poet is not here comparing God to the princes or mighty ones of the earth generally, but to the factitious gods of Egypt exclusively, as is evident from the whole context. The latter were unable to deliver the Egyptians from their overthrow and destruction in the Red Sea, whereas the former had completely delivered his people Israel from the bondage of Pharoah. The gods of Egypt were manifestly impotent, the God of Israel was evidently omnipotent. These two objects of worship are placed in immediate juxtaposition, in order to render the contrast the more striking. The hosts of Pharoah, himself, his captains, and his nobles, had been all in an instant overwhelmed by the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, while the dumb deities of Egypt had shown how utterly unable they were to save their worshippers from his fatal wrath. In spite of their supposed power to protect their votaries, the latter, the flower of populous Egypt, together with their sovereign and his princes, were all drowned.

Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?

* Dr. A. Clarke's note.

This line forms an incomplete parallelism with the preceding, both clauses maintaining the infinite supremacy of the divine nature. God is glorious in that holiness and immaculate purity which constitute his perfection. He is not only great in power, but infinite in goodness: in fact, the attribute of goodness aggrandizes and renders perfect the attribute of power. There could be no God without both. None is like unto him, because the perfection of goodness cannot belong to any save to him alone. The repetition of the clause, "Who is like unto thee?" though it does not literally advance the sense, adds additional emphasis to it, and fixes it with a deeper impression upon the mind, as in the instance before noticed,* besides giving a cadence to the lines, which not only improves their symmetry, but fills the ear with an imaginary harmony, when only the eye traces them, that immediately carries a strong impulse of devotion to the heart. God is "glorious in holiness," in that very quality of perfection which he requires all his rational creatures to imitate, in order that they may be finally "among the number of those whom he loves and delights in," being exalted to that inheritance "whither our Saviour Christ is gone before," to prepare it for them in the regions of eternal glory.

"Fearful in praises." God is one who should be praised with reverence and godly fear, "the abstract being used," as Dr. Dodd observes, "for the concrete, as in St. Paul's Epistle to the

* Verse 6.

Philippians.* ‘If there be any praise,’ which means, if there be any thing praiseworthy.” “Fearful in praises,” therefore, will signify, that whenever the Deity is approached, though we honour him with praises on our tongues, we must likewise do so with fear in our hearts, that is, with a godly fear of incurring his displeasure, not with an abject dread of exciting his vengeance, as that is an unholy fear, because, as the Apostle truly declares, such fear hath torment. God’s worshippers, then, are to approach him with pious awe and solemn reverence, not only because he is glorious in holiness, but likewise because he is “great in the excellency of his power,” “doing wonders,” or performing miracles, as well for the salvation of the righteous as for the destruction of the wicked.

The different expressions in this passage, characterizing the highest attributes of Deity, are chosen with extraordinary discrimination: they bring the Godhead before us in the unutterable grandeur of his perfection, filling the mind with the august idea of his unlimited and incommunicable attributes. “Doing wonders.” He had already manifested his marvellous power, in the ten plagues by which the idolatrous Egyptians were punished, by a succession of miracles, and the most signal contempt thrown upon their divinities, showing their utter impotency to protect their blind worshippers against the punitive dispensations of Him who, in the language of holy Job,† the sublimest of poets,

* Chap. iv. 8.

† Chap. vii. 9.

Doeth great things, and unsearchable ;
Marvellous things without number.

The eleventh verse of the thanksgiving ode, comprising the triplet under notice, is thus paraphrased by Bishop Patrick : " There are none among all that are called gods, in heaven or in earth, that are comparable to thee, O Lord, whose perfections infinitely transcend all others, and are therefore to be praised with the greatest fear and reverence ; for thy very works are wonderful, and to be had in perpetual admiration." Lowth's version of this triplet, though it does not differ in sense from that of our Bible, has a more appropriate turn given to it by the substitution of Jehovah for Lord, which latter term is decidedly one of inferior, or I may rather say, of subsidiary import :—

Who is like unto thee among the gods, O Jehovah !
Who is like unto thee, adorable in holiness !
Fearful in praises, who workest wonders !

" Although," says Dr. Adam Clarke,* " our English term Lord does not give the peculiar meaning of the original word *JEHOVAH*, it nevertheless conveys a strong and noble sense. Lord is a contraction of the Anglo-saxon *Hlaford*, afterwards written *Loverd*, and lastly *Lord*, from *hlaf*, bread, hence our word *loaf*, and *ford*, to supply, to give out. The word therefore implies, *the giver of bread*, that is, He who deals out all the necessities of life. Our ancient English noblemen were accustomed to keep a continual open

* See his note on Gen. ii. 4.

house, where all their vassals and all strangers had full liberty to enter and eat as much as they would; and hence those noblemen had the honourable name of *Lords*, that is, the dispensers of bread. There are about three of the ancient nobility who still keep up this honourable custom, from which the very name of their nobility is derived. We have already seen* with what judgment our Saxon ancestors expressed *Deus*, the Supreme Being, by the term God; and we see the same judgment consulted by their use of the term LORD to express the word *Dominus*, by which terms the Vulgate version, which they used, expresses *Elohim* and Jehovah, rendered in our translation *Lord God*. God is the *good being*, and LORD is the *dispenser of bread*, the giver of every good and perfect gift, who liberally affords the bread that perisheth to every man, and has amply provided the bread that endures unto everlasting life for every human soul." Horne Tooke derides this interpretation, but I think with more plausibility than justice.

Thou stretchedst out thy right-hand,
The earth swallowed them.

Here is continued the picture of destruction brought upon the Egyptians, and represented as one of the chief "wonders" or miracles wrought by God in favour of his chosen people; and many of these mighty works were performed in their favour during their long journey through the wilderness, though the dividing of the Red

* Gen. i. 1.

Sea and what immediately ensued was the greatest of them all.

The earth swallowed them,

is nothing more than a poetical hyperbole, signifying that they were so completely sunk to the bottom of the Red Sea, as to be covered by the mud in which they became, so to speak, swallowed. In all large eastern rivers which are periodically swelled by tropical rains, there is a vast alluvial deposit; this pervades the entire channel, and covers or buries whatever sinks to the bottom; the phrase, therefore, "the earth swallowed them," was probably designed to be nothing more than a varying, or rather a strengthening, of the prior description of the Egyptians sinking in the mighty waters, the consequence of their sinking being added. Dr. Adam Clarke, however, appears to think otherwise, upon the authority of R. Elieser, who supposes that the bodies of the drowned, being cast upon the sea-shore, the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them. Taking up this opinion, the learned commentator just referred to says, "It is very likely there was also an earthquake on this occasion, and that chasms were made in the bottom of the sea, by which many of the Egyptians were swallowed up, though multitudes were overwhelmed by the waters, whose dead bodies were afterwards thrown ashore. The Psalmist strongly intimates that there was an earthquake on this occasion: 'The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven, the lightnings lightened the world, the earth trembled and

shook.' '* I do not think this generally judicious expositor establishes the truth of his assumption—he leaves it an assumption still. His quotation from the seventy-seventh Psalm does not by any means prove the fact of an earthquake. It forms part of a sublime picture of an event then long past, into the details of which the inspired bard does not enter, but merely represents the general effect, by enumerating some of the most splendid accessories in nature, all concurring to the grand issue. The whole description of the Psalmist is one of extreme sublimity:—

Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people,
 The sons of Jacob and Joseph.
 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee;
 They were afraid : the depths also were troubled.
 The clouds poured out water :
 The skies sent out a sound :
 Thine arrows went abroad.
 The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven :
 The lightnings lightened the world :
 The earth trembled and shook.
 Thy way is in the sea,
 Thy path in the great waters,
 And thy footsteps are not known.
 Thou leddest thy people like a flock
 By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

It is evident that the Psalmist in this splendid passage did not aim at giving an exact description, but only a grand general picture of the solemn event to which he refers. He does not particularize, but uses the most impressive images which presented themselves, in order to depict certainly one of the greatest events which history has recorded. Had there really been an

* Psalm lxxvii. 15, ad fin.

earthquake, is it to be supposed that Moses would have left such an important fact to rest upon the doubtful interpretation of a passage, entering, as he has done, into the minutest details of that scene of sudden devastation? Ainsworth's note upon the place is much to the purpose—

The earth swallowed them,

“that is, the bottom of the sea, the abyss which the sea covers; as in Jonah ii. 6. The word rendered earth sometimes signifies the lowest part of the earth—*pars infima conjuscunq̃ue rei*, says Calasio. The lowest part of the earth devoured them.”

Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people
Which thou hast redeemed :
Thou hast guided them in thy strength
Unto thy holy habitation.

In the first part of this passage the poet passes with an abrupt transition from the destruction of the Egyptians to the deliverance of the Israelites. This is very judicious, as it places the two grand actions which the poem celebrates in strong and immediate contrast, thereby at once distinguishing the two most prominent attributes of the Deity, his justice and mercy. In these attributes all the rest may be said to be included. Infinite mercy presupposes all goodness—every variety and modification of benevolence and of love: infinite justice, likewise, includes infinite truth, omnipotence, almighty knowledge, and perfect infallibility, so that these two qualities may

be said to form the sum and perfection of the Godhead. How admirably are they both brought before the mind in this transcendant song! The divine vengeance had just been displayed in the terrible effects of its desolation. Thousands of wretched beings, who knew not God, but mocked him with their idolatries, had been suddenly hurled into the embrace of death, to pass from it, without further preparation, to that solemn audit which shall determine their condition in a world eternal. But how different was the divine dispensation towards the posterity of that patriarch to whom God had made the promise, not only of a temporal inheritance, but of a Redeemer to spring from his seed! They were rescued from bondage and restored to freedom. Great and manifold, O God, were thy mercies towards them!

Thou in thy mercy hast led forth thy people.

How delightful is the image here suggested to the imagination! It is simple, but exquisitely appropriate. God appears in the character of a shepherd, leading forth his sheep to richer pastures and clearer streams, where

*They shall not be afraid for the terror by night;
Nor for the arrow that flieth by day;
Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness;
Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.*

“Thy people which thou hast redeemed.” May not this have reference as well to the posterior redemption through Christ from the slavery of sin, as to the immediate redemption of the Israel-

ites from the bondage of Pharoah? Incidental allusions are so frequently made in the Old Testament to the great act of expiation promised to fallen man in Paradise, and repeated to Abraham, that I cannot help thinking it was intended in this place, especially as the same thing appears to be signified in the second verse of this sacred song. And surely this signal deliverance from Egyptian tyranny may be taken as a type of the still more signal deliverance from sin and death, wrought by the expiatory sacrifice on Mount Calvary, that being the glorious consummation of the first prophetic promise in Paradise.

Thou hast guided them in thy strength,—

in other words, thou hast brought them forth, as it is elsewhere expressed, “through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm;” (Deut. v. 15.) Thou hast manifested such power in the release of thy chosen people, as none but the Omnipotent could display, for who can calculate or estimate the strength of God? Thou hast guided them with thy arm of might “unto thy holy habitation”—that settlement destined by thee, in thy merciful loving-kindness, to be the future abode of thy people Israel.

This is called God’s holy habitation because the Almighty abode with the posterity of Jacob in that land of promise whither he conducted and “with great might succoured them;” he abode with them in the Shechinah, that divine light which overshadowed the mercy-seat in the Tabernacle and in the first Temple, and continued

until the destruction of that stupendous edifice, being replaced by the divine presence, in the person of Jesus Christ the righteous, in the second Temple, which was thus sanctified by the blessed influence of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—that mysterious hypostasis of the eternal Godhead, which is so wonderful a mystery, that the angels, though they desire to look into, cannot comprehend it. Just cause, therefore, is there for universal adoration of the celestial Trinity, as our own poet Dryden has so solemnly and so beautifully sung:—

Immortal honour, endless fame,
Attend the Almighty Father's name;
The Saviour Son be glorified,
Who for lost man's redemption died;
And equal adoration be,
Eternal Paraclete! to thee!

Houbigant reads the thirteenth verse in the present rather than in the past tense, as he imagines, and I fully concur with him in this opinion, that it gives more expression to the clauses.

Thou, in thy mercy, leadest forth the people
Whom thou hast redeemed:
Thou, in thy strength, leadest them forth
To thy holy habitation.

The adoption of the present tense is here very significant. It immediately carries us to the event. We see it, as it were, actually passing before our eyes, not as done, but doing, the impression of which is ever new, and strengthened by the recurrence of our thoughts to what is presented to them as actually in the course of

consummation. This mode of description renders the past, so to speak, virtually present, and gives it all the effect of a new and immediate reality. I confess, therefore, that I prefer this reading to that in our common translation. It has this advantage too, that it not only brings the past back to the present, but actually carries it into the future, which, as this part of the poem, from the twelfth to the nineteenth verse, seems to have been a prediction of God's designed dispensations towards those whom he had so miraculously redeemed, I should say was intended by the inspired bard.

The land of Canaan, to which the Israelites on their deliverance from Egyptian tyranny journeyed, was supposed by the Jews to be particularly holy, inasmuch as it furnished holy offerings for the temple; but not all parts of it indiscriminately. They supposed also, that neither the Shechinah, nor the sacred spirit, dwelt on any person, even a prophet, out of this land.

The boundaries of this country are, the Mediterranean sea on the west; Lebanon and Syria on the north; Arabia Deserta and the land of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Midianites, on the east; the river of Egypt, or of the Wilderness, the Desert of Zin, the southern shore of the Dead Sea, and the river of Arnon, on the south; and Egypt on the south-west. Near Mount Lebanon stood the city of Dan, and near the southern extremity of the land Beersheba; hence the expression "from Dan to Beersheba," to denote the entire length of the land of Canaan.

Its extreme length was about a hundred and seventy miles, and its width about eighty. By the Abrahamic covenant, recorded in Genesis xv. 8, the original grant of land to the Israelites, was "from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates." The boundaries of it are more accurately described by Moses in Numbers xxxiv. 1—16.*

* See Calmet's Dictionary, art. Canaan.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Thanksgiving Ode continued, from verse 14 to the end.

THE whole of what follows the thirteenth verse in the thanksgiving ode of Moses, was evidently composed under the influence of the spirit of prophecy, as it refers to events which had their accomplishment in subsequent generations, precisely as here stated. These events, indeed, are only referred to in general terms; they are nevertheless sufficiently distinct to show that the facts which afterwards came to pass were at this moment in the poet's mind, who saw with prophetic accuracy the future condition of Canaan.

The people shall hear and be afraid :
Sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.
Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed ;
The mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them ;
All the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.

I fully agree with Dr. Dodd, who says that " the sublimity of this passage would appear much more striking, if it were rendered agreeably to the Hebrew :—

The people hear ; they tremble ;
Sorrow takes hold on the inhabitants of Palestina ;
Strait the dukes of Edom are amazed ;
The mighty men of Moab, trembling takes hold upon them :

All the inhabitants of Canaan melt away.
 Terror falls on them, and fear from the greatness of thine arm.
 They shall be dumb as a stone
 Till thy people pass over, O Lord—
 Till thy people pass over which thou hast purchased.

“ Every reader of taste must discern the sublimity and energy which is given to this passage by reading the verbs throughout in the present tense.”*

What I have already said in the foregoing chapter will equally apply here. The reading suggested by Houbigant, and approved by Dr. Dodd, exhibits undoubtedly much more energy than that given in our authorized version. Kennicott reads part in the present and part in the future tense.

The people shall hear and be afraid.

This prediction we find afterwards confirmed in the reign of Joshua :—“ And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites which were on this side Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted; neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.”†

Sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.

The Philistines, to whom allusion is here made, were a brave and warlike people, and

* See Dodd's note.

† Joshua v. 1.

frequently engaged in sanguinary encounters with the Israelites. Joshua took possession of their land; after him Shamgar, Sampson, and Saul, severally defeated them. They, however, maintained their independence until finally subdued by David.*

Although the Philistines inhabited a part only of Canaan, it subsequently took its name of Palestine from that people. "The Philistines," says Calmet, "were a powerful people in Palestine even in Abraham's time, since they had then kings and considerable cities. They are not enumerated among the nations devoted to extermination, whose territory the Lord assigned to the Hebrews. They were not of the cursed seed of Canaan. However, Joshua did not forbear to give their land to the Hebrews, and to attack them by command from the Lord, because they possessed various districts promised to Israel. But these conquests of Joshua must have been ill-maintained, since under the judges, under Saul, and at the beginning of the reign of King David, the Philistines had their kings and their lords, which they called Sazenim; since their state was divided into five little kingdoms or satrapies, and since they oppressed Israel during the government of the High Priest Eli, that of Samuel, and during the reign of Saul, for about one hundred and twenty years, from the year of the world 2840 to 2960. True it is that Shamgar, Sampson, Samuel, and Saul,

* 2 Sam. v. 17, ad fin.

opposed them, and were victorious over them with great slaughter at various times, but did not reduce their power. They maintained their independence till David subdued them."

The first couplet of the portion of the thanksgiving ode last quoted clearly exhibits the parallelism of gradation, though, as Dodd gives it, we are principally struck by the extreme beauty of the climax. First the people hear, apprehension then overtakes them, which is followed by bitter "sorrow" or misery. How aptly are the successions of consequences discriminated through the whole of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth verses. The steps from consequence to consequence are hurried and vehement;—they hear, they tremble, sorrow seizes upon them. This is extremely animated, and produces a strong effect upon the imagination of the reader who has a soul for the beauties of true poetry.

Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed.

It appears that Idumæa, or Edom, a country to the south of Judæa, and inhabited by the descendants of Esau, was, at the time referred to by Moses, under the government of dukes, or a number of subordinate chiefs. "The word duke, being a title of honour in use among ourselves, and signifying a higher order of nobility, is apt to mislead the reader who, in Gen. xxxiv. 15—43, finds a long list of the dukes of Edom; but the word duke, from the latin dux, merely signifies a leader or chief; the word chief, there-

fore, ought rather to have been preferred in our translation.”*

Dr. A. Clarke has a very satisfactory note upon this term.† “The word duke,” he says, “comes from the latin word *dux*, a captain or leader. The Hebrew *alluph* has the same signification; and as it is also the term for a thousand, which is a grand capital, or leading number, probably the alluphey or dukes had this name from being leaders of, or captains over, a company of one thousand men, just as those among the Greeks called chiliarchs, which signifies the same; and as the Romans called those centurions who were captains over one hundred men, from the Latin word *centum*, which signifies a hundred.”

The Edomites inhabiting Idumæa were subdued by David, thus fulfilling Isaac’s prophecy, (Gen. xxvii. 29, 30,) that Jacob should govern Esau.

The mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them.

“The Moabites had their habitation beyond Jordan, east of, and adjacent to, the Dead Sea, on both sides the river Arnon. Their capital city was situated on that river, and was called Ar, or Areopolis, or Ariel of Moab, or Rabbah Moab, that is, the capital of Moab, or Kir-haresh, the city with brick walls. This country was originally possessed by a race of giants, called Emim (Deut. ii. 11, 12). The Moabites conquered them; afterwards the Amorites took a

* See additions to Calmet’s Dictionary, art. Duke.

† See on Gen. xxxvi. 15.

part from the Moabites (Judges xi. 13). Moses conquered that part which belonged to the Amorites, and gave it to the tribe of Reuben. The Moabites were spared by Moses, as God had restricted him (Deut. ii. 9). But there was always a great antipathy between the Moabites and the Israelites, which occasioned many wars. Balak, king of this people, endeavoured to prevail upon Balaam to curse Israel; and Balaam seduced the Hebrews to idolatry and uncleanness, by means of the daughters of Moab (Num. xxv. 1, 2). God ordained that the Moabites should not enter into the congregation of his people even to the tenth generation (Deut. xxiii. 3) because they had the inhumanity to refuse the Israelites a passage through their country, nor would supply them with bread and water in their necessity."*

"Hanun, king of the Ammonites, having insulted David's ambassadors, David made war against him, and subdued Moab and Ammon; under which subjection they continued, until the separation of the ten tribes, when they were attached to the kings of Israel till the death of Ahab."†

All the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.

This was completed in the final subjugation of Canaan by the posterity of Jacob. In the passage now under consideration, the gradations of distress are judiciously distinguished. First there is to be *fear* among the people; then *sorrow* is to overtake the inhabitants of Palestine;

* Calmet's Dictionary, art. Moabites.

† Ibid.

next the princes of Edom are to be *amazed* or painfully disturbed at their overthrow; then the Moabites shall tremble with terror at their numerous defeats; and finally the land of Canaan shall fall under the sway of the victorious Israelites. All this is in the greatest degree poetical. The poet continues his description of their conquest with his accustomed felicity of illustration:

Fear and dread shall fall upon them;
By the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone,
Till thy people pass over, O Lord—
Till the people pass over which thou hast purchased.

The first two lines of this latter passage are explanatory of the last line of the preceding quotation. It was there said that the Canaanites should fall before the conquering swords of the Israelites. The former are represented as so utterly overcome with consternation at the evident manifestation of omnipotent power directing to their issues the exertions of the latter, as to be unable to offer any effectual resistance. It is intimated that their energies should not only be paralyzed, but their troops either cut off or driven from their homes, to seek refuge among the neighbouring states, in such multitudes, that the country should be comparatively depopulated. The divine interposition in favour of the Israelites is adverted to in this place, in order to remind them that "it was not their own arm which would get them the victory," but the greatness of his who divided the waters of the Red Sea. Moses foretold, that through the divine intervention the inhabitants of Canaan should be rendered so impotent by their alarm,

as to offer no resistance to the entrance of God's people into their territories—that inheritance covenanted to the seed of Abraham.

“Till the people pass over,” that is, till the Israelites pass over Jordan, the waters of which were miraculously divided, like those of the Red Sea, striking terror into the hearts of the Canaanites, who allowed their enemies to enter their dominions without daring to oppose them.

The prophetic spirit was evidently upon Moses when he composed this ode, for it is quite clear that in it he explicitly foretold, and this too in a manner not to be misunderstood, several of those memorable events which were afterwards so literally fulfilled according to his prophecy. The passage of the Jordan here referred to by the Jewish lawgiver, was only less a miracle than the passage of the Red Sea, inasmuch as the channel is vastly narrower and there was no destruction of enemies, but merely a miraculous safe-conduct of the Israelites. This transit is thus described by Joshua (chap. iii. 15—17): “And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down towards the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry

ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."

We can hardly be surprised that "fear and dread" should fall upon the people of Canaan at witnessing such a stupendous miracle. Though, according to the accounts of modern travellers, the Jordan is an inconsiderable river by comparison with the principal rivers of the four great divisions of the world; nevertheless, when swelled by mountain torrents, and this takes place periodically, it is still a broad and deep stream. It will be seen, too, from Joshua's account, that the Israelites passed dry-shod through its channel at the time of its periodical increase, when it had overflowed its banks.

"As we approach the Jordan," says Volney,* "the country becomes more hilly and better watered: the valley through which this river flows abounds, in general, in pasturage, especially in the upper part of it. As for the river itself, it is very far from being of that importance which we are apt to assign to it. The Arabs, who are ignorant of the name of Jordan, call it El Sharia. Its breadth, between the two principal lakes, in few places exceeds sixty or eighty feet, but its depth is about ten or twelve. In winter it overflows its narrow channel, and, swelled by the rains, forms a sheet of water sometimes a quarter of a league broad. The time of its overflowing is usually in March, when the snows melt on the mountains of the

* Travels, vol. ii. p. 300.

Shaik, at which time, more than at any other, its waters are troubled and of a yellow hue, and its course is impetuous. Its banks are covered with a thick forest of reeds, willows, and various shrubs, which serve as an asylum for wild boars, ounces, jackals, hares, and different kinds of birds." Maundrell speaks of the rapidity of this celebrated river, and describes it at the periods of its ordinary flow as no less than sixty feet wide in the narrowest parts.

Thou shalt bring them in,
And plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance,
In the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in,
In the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

Bishop Patrick thus paraphrases this and the preceding quotation: "Such a terror shall fall upon the Canaanites, that they shall be no more able to stir than a stone, when they hear of this dreadful execution—the destruction of the hosts of Pharoah in the Red Sea; but suffer thy people, O Lord, to pass to their inheritance which thou hast prepared for them. Thither shalt thou bring them, and there make them to take root in the highest mountains of that country, where thou hast designed a place for thine own dwelling, of which thy power also will lay the foundation."

"Thou shalt bring them in." As soon as they have passed the river, under the guidance of thy almighty arm, and to the consternation of that idolatrous race who seek the protection of gods, which are not able to help them, they shall immediately enter upon the covenanted possession

into which thou shalt bring them, and with the same power, already so miraculously exhibited in their favour.

Plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance.

This line is wonderfully significative. To plant signifies to fix in such a manner that the objects planted shall take root and grow. The term expresses increase as well as permanency; and the mountain is a most appropriate symbol of the durability and elevated wisdom of the Hebrew government, regulated by laws which may be said, in the figurative language of Scripture, to have been written with the finger of God.

“The mountain of thine inheritance” signifies, no doubt, as Patrick’s paraphrase implies, Mount Zion, upon which the Temple was subsequently built. Moses foresaw, under the influence of the prophetic afflatus, that there God would eventually “fix the habitation of his holiness,” that there his pure worship would be fully established, and that there would finally appear the promised Emmanuel, from whose merciful revelations the “glad tidings” of salvation should be declared to every creature. This interpretation is confirmed by what follows:—

*In the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in,
In the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.*

This couplet is distinctly a parallelism of the cognate order, for the two lines have nearly the same sense, which, however, certainly rises to a higher degree of elevation in the last than in the first line. In the one the idea is vague, in the other

definite, though in both the correspondency is not to be mistaken:—

The place which the Lord “had made for him to dwell in”

can be no other than the sanctuary, or temple, afterwards erected on Mount Zion, an edifice of which the Jews were always justly proud, and upon which Moses seems to dwell with great satisfaction, extending the idea through three lines, as if loth to relinquish it. The three clauses rise progressively in importance. First he mentions “the *mountain* of thine inheritance,” that is, the land of Canaan, to which the children of Israel were to be brought, called mountain generally, because it was a country abounding with hills; next follows—

The place which the Lord had prepared for himself to dwell in,

the spot upon which that temple was built, wherein his name was hereafter to be magnified, and where he dwelt between the Cherubim; lastly, we have the *sanctuary* itself, which he established for the Jewish worship before the coming of Christ, and out of the ruins of which, if I may so say, has sprung up that Church first established by him, and which shall endure throughout all ages, to the last great period of dissolution and renovation, when it shall be transformed from a Church militant upon earth to a Church triumphant in heaven.

Moses concludes this divine song with a burst of rapturous exultation on God’s universal and everlasting dominion:—

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever !

This appears to have been a sort of chorus in which all the people joined, and forms, in truth, a grand close to the song. Although terminating with this line,—for the nineteenth verse, which immediately follows, is a mere iteration of the subject of the ode,—there is a response made by Miriam, the sister of Moses, after the intervention of a verse and half of plain prose. It is supposed that Miriam and the Israelitish women made this response at certain intervals, during the song which was sung by Moses and the sons of Israel. They repeated the two first lines, altering only the commencing words, in order to apply them to the whole assembly present, thus—

Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously ;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Dr. Dodd, speaking of the nineteenth verse, says that it “contains what the Greeks call the *epiphonema* of the song, which includes the whole subject of it, like the first chorus. The conclusion being simple and less figurative than the former parts has led some writers to suppose that the poetical part ends at the nineteenth verse ; but this is a mistake, as this verse is metrical in the Hebrew no less than the others.”

Of this I have no doubt, for let any one compare it with the twentieth verse, and he will at once perceive a broad difference between them. It will be observed, that the terms employed are not literal : they are evidently intended for pictorial effect : the clauses are in exact keeping

with the opening couplet of the poem, of which they form a corresponding division, so that they clearly constitute a part of the ode. The natural conclusion is, therefore, that they are metrical, precisely in the same degree as the portions preceding them.

The concluding chorus, as I have elsewhere said,* was taken up and sung alternately, the women responding to the men. The poem appears to have been divided into four parts, and at the end of each part Miriam and the women are supposed to have chanted the chorus, the male voices ceasing until they had finished.

To enumerate every beauty in this magnificent production would carry me beyond all reasonable bounds ; but I trust sufficient has been said to prove that Moses was one of the greatest poets which the world has ever known, and only equalled by those who, like himself, were divinely inspired. The concurrent attestation of all great Hebrew scholars has been recorded that this is a composition of wonderful power and sublimity, and the earliest specimen of a regularly distributed ode.

* See pp. 259 and 315.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Kennicott's version of the Thanksgiving Ode explained.

DR. KENNICOTT, in his admirable version of the thanksgiving song of Moses, has distributed it, as he imagines it to have been sung, immediately after the event which it commemorates. I shall give it here at length.

Moses.—*Part the first.*

I will sing to Jehovah, for he hath triumphed gloriously ;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.
My strength and my song is Jehovah ;
And he is become to me for salvation :
This is my God and I will celebrate him ;
The God of my father, and I will exalt him.
Jehovah is mighty in battle ! } Perhaps a Chorus
Jehovah is his name. } sung by the men.

*Chorus, by Miriam and the women, perhaps sung
first in this place.*

**Oh ! sing ye to Jehovah, for he hath triumphed gloriously !
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.**

Moses.—Part the second.

**Pharoah's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea ;
And his chosen captains are drowned in the Red Sea ;**

The depths have covered them, they went down ;
 (They sank) to the bottom as a stone.
 Thy right hand, Jehovah, is become glorious in power ;
 Thy right hand, Jehovah, dasheth in pieces the enemy.
 And in the greatness of thine excellence thou overthrowest them
 that rise against thee ;
 Thou sendest forth thy wrath, which consumeth them as stubble :
 Even at the blast of thy displeasure the waters are gathered
 together ;
 The floods stand upright as a heap ;
 Congealed are thy depths in the very heart of the sea.
 Oh ! sing ye to Jehovah, &c. (*Chorus by the women.*)

Moses.—Part the third.

The enemy said : ' I will pursue, I shall overtake ;
 I shall divide the spoil, my soul shall be satiated with them ;
 I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.'
 Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them ;
 They sank as lead in the mighty waters.
 Who is like thee among the gods, O Jehovah ?
 Who is like thee, glorious in holiness !
 Fearful in praises ; performing wonders !
 Thou stretchest out thy right hand, the earth swalloweth them !
 Thou in thy mercy leadeest the people whom thou hast redeemed !
 Thou in thy strength guidest to the habitation of thy holiness !
 Oh ! sing ye to Jehovah, &c. (*Chorus by the women.*)

Moses.—Part the fourth.

The nations have heard and are afraid ;
 Sorrow hath seized the inhabitants of Palestine.
 Already are the dukes of Edom in consternation,
 And the mighty men of Moab, trembling hath seized them ;
 All the inhabitants of Canaan do faint ;
 Fear and dread shall fall upon them ;
 Through the greatness of thine arm, they shall be still as a stone :
 Till thy people, Jehovah, pass over (Jordan ;)
 Till thy people pass over whom thou hast redeemed ;
 Thou shalt bring them and plant them in the mount of thine
 inheritance :
 The place for thy rest which thou, Jehovah, hast made ;
 The sanctuary, Jehovah, which thy hands have established.

Grand chorus by all.

Jehovah for ever and ever shall reign.

According to this division it will be seen that in the opening distich of the first part, the subject is proposed and the reason of the jubilant action of Moses and the Israelites stated. Then follows a strain of ardent exultation on the divine mercy and power, which terminates with the repetition of the proemial couplet as a chorus, with a slight alteration, by Miriam and the women. The whole is full of the highest poetic fervour.

The second part begins with a renewal of the subject, which is the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and tyranny. The destruction of Pharaoh, his nobles, his captains, and his host, is described in a manner amazingly solemn and imposing. The five first couplets are magnificent specimens of gradational parallelism. I know of no descriptive poetry which will bear a comparison with them out of the sacred volume. The closing line, as I have already observed, is incomparably beautiful. I do not think that the inversion, "congealed are thy depths," as Kennicott renders the passage, is so good as the common rendering, which is not only more simple, but at the same time unquestionably more natural—

And the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

The third part opens with the haughty confidence of Pharaoh, who relying upon the number and discipline of his troops, declares his cruel determination to exterminate the fugitive Israelites. The divine power is sublimely displayed

as exercised upon the Egyptians, and his ineffable mercy, as extended to his chosen people. Throughout the whole of this part there is a strain of eloquent exultation, and it closes as before with a chorus by Miriam and the women.

The fourth part commences with a description of the effect produced upon the Canaanites by the approach of the armies of Israel to their country, heralded by miracles which proved the superintendence of an omnipotent supporter and guide. Then follows a prophetic representation of what is to result from the final deliverance of Jacob's seed from Egyptian bondage; the whole closing with a grand chorus. The parallelisms, which have been already noticed, in the latter part are manifest and eminently beautiful. Nothing can exceed in vivid colouring and vigorous force of description the effect produced among the nations of Canaan by the apprehended success of the strangers. It is not an easy matter to render the beauties of this noble ode obvious to every perception, because they are of that specific character not readily to be traced and apprehended except by those who have a true feeling for poetry, and can distinguish it wherever it is present by the force of their own taste and natural relish for peculiar excellencies.

As the character of this divine song is essentially different from the compositions of a similar description belonging to our own age and country, it often fails to awaken the enthusiasm of such as are judges of poetry rather by that convention of opinion which gives its bias and

direction to ordinary judgments, than by any exclusive taste which they possess above the great unintellectual mass of their fellow beings, who though rational creatures, do not exhibit any high pretensions to the distinction of wise. They admire just what it is the fashion to admire, and beyond this they have little or no perception of the beautiful. It must be pointed out to them before they can perceive it, not being blessed with the gift of discovery, and indeed they often take for granted upon the credit of public judgment what they do not themselves possess the faculty to appreciate. In the writings of Lord Byron, for instance, the most poorly-gifted person in the endowments of intellect, assumes the power of discovering beauties of the highest order, while in the song of Moses it is probable that such judges would discover no beauties at all. It is not, however, therefore to be concluded, that no beauties exist, for it must be manifest to any mind of real discrimination that the latter is distinguished above every other composition of its kind for power, grandeur, and sublimity. There are persons who would be ashamed to confess their non-appreciation of a popular poet whose works it has become a sort of rabid fashion to admire, and which are consequently to be seen gaudily embellished in every corner of the kingdom, but would feel no shame in failing to discover the beauties of Hebrew poetry, these not having yet become objects of general admiration, only because sacred themes, however sublime, do not harmonize with the selfish and unspiritual sympathies of the multitude.

I have alluded to the poetry of Lord Byron, as it has become an admitted test of true taste among almost every class of readers; yet I do not hesitate to say that this powerful, but morbidly passionate writer has been, though I readily acknowledge his rare endowments, greatly over-rated. His poetry, full as it is of rich thoughts, luxuriant images, and vivid pictures, shifting in an almost endless variety of changes, seldom elevates the soul, and has no tendency to purify the heart. So far as its moral influence operates, it is nothing better than the fabled apples on the Dead Sea shore, lovely to the eye and tempting to the taste, yet at the core containing nothing but ashes and bitterness.

The poetry of Lord Byron is for the most part sustained by the gorgeous amplification and sombre diffuseness which everywhere abound in it. The dreams of a distempered imagination, crowded with vast but harrowing images, and casting a murky grandeur over the brightest aspects of humanity, are too often presented to the reader of this author's popular compositions. There all is sombre, dark, satanic; even his very gaiety assumes a fierce and reckless wildness, which repels the pure mind and shocks the truly uncorrupted heart. Amid many blemishes, however, I am fully disposed to admit that there is in the writings of this author much that is striking, much that is powerfully affecting, much that is brilliant, though little or nothing that can be truly called sublime. In general it may be said that Lord Byron's poetry is splendidly exuberant and lavishly rich; yet it lacks condensation, it has

no severe simplicity, none of the hale, uncomplicated elements of pure self-sustained sublimity: all is vigorously copious and elaborately magnificent. The gorgeousness of the costume frequently gives an overpowering lustre to the thought, rather than that transparent brilliancy through which it is seen, like a beautiful shell at the bottom of a limpid stream; and thus, though we are dazzled by the prodigious brightness of the medium, our perceptions are baffled or repelled by its painful intensity. There is the lurid splendour and fiery radiance of Pandemonium, rather than the lambent glory of the Athenian temple. His poetry more resembles the burning glasses of Archimedes than a clear speculum in which the reflections are so perfect as to be obvious to the most feeble perception. On the contrary, the thanksgiving ode of Moses is invested with a sublime poetical glory. Though abounding in strong figures, there is no lack of perspicuity, no diffuseness, no extreme ornament, no artifice, no violent exaggeration, no harsh or incongruous metaphors; all is simple, true, appropriate, and taken as a mere composition, apart from its inspiration, there is unquestionably nothing of such genuine grandeur to be found in the composition of any uninspired author.

In order to show the truth of the observations just made with reference to Lord Byron's poetry, I shall quote one of the most admired passages of his poems. It is the description of a cataract from the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

The roar of waters ! from the headlong height
 Velino cleaves the wave-worn precipice ;
 The fall of waters ! rapid as the light
 The flashing mass foams, shaking the abyss ;
 The hell of waters ! where they howl and hiss
 And boil in endless torture ; while the sweat
 Of their great agony, wrung out from this
 Their Phlegethon, curls round the rocks of jet
 That gird the gulf around, in pitiless horror set,

And mounts in spray the skies, and thence again
 Returns in an unceasing shower, which round,
 With its unemptied cloud of gentle rain,
 Is an eternal April to the ground,
 Making it all one emerald :—how profound
 The gulf ! and how the giant element,
 From rock to rock leaps with delirious bound,
 Crushing the cliffs, which, downward worn and rent
 With his fierce footsteps, yield in chasms a fearful vent,

To the broad column which rolls on, and shows
 More like the fountain of an infant sea
 Torn from the womb of mountains by the throes
 Of a new world, than only thus to be
 Parent of rivers, which flow gushingly,
 With many windings, through the vale. Look back !
 Lo ! where it comes, like an eternity,
 As if to sweep down all things in its tract,
 Charming the eye with dread—a matchless cataract,

Horribly beautiful ! but on the verge
 From side to side, beneath the glittering morn,
 An iris sits amidst the infernal surge,
 Like hope upon a death bed, and, unworn
 Its steady dyes, while all around is torn
 By the distracted waters, bears serene
 Its brilliant hues with all their beams unshorn ;
 Resembling, 'mid the torture of the scene,
 Love watching madness with unalterable mien.

Now all this is descriptive of the horrible, not
 of the sublime ; and the great characteristic of
 a cataract, anywhere and under any aspect,
 must be grandeur not horror. The associa-
 tions here are most of them in the highest de-

gree repulsive, besides being out of place. We have hell, the mythological lake, or river of fire, crushing cliffs, the throes of parturition, an iris sitting amidst the infernal surge, hope on a death-bed, and to complete the appalling picture, love in immediate juxtaposition with madness, and these to realize the features of a cataract, certainly one of the most stupendous objects in external nature. The noble author has here confounded the horrible with the sublime. It is a great mistake to suppose that merely powerful but gloomy and phantasmal images constitute sublimity; the mind must be elevated not shocked, nor ever will be so by just representations of God's works, however awful. The impression upon beholding such an object as was intended to be depicted by Lord Byron, should be awe, not dread; but no persons in their senses could desire to witness such a scene as he really depicts—they might as well desire to look into hell at once. They would turn with shuddering from the contemplation of such a frightful picture. The passage might serve admirably as descriptive of an inundation of Phlegethon, a river of the heathen hell, but is quite out of place as a representation of the stupendous magnificence of nature. It is a phantasmagoria, not a real scene, and the revolting display is rather heightened than subdued by the small oasis of pastoral beauty introduced into the second stanza—a mere spot of repose and verdure amid a factitious scene of repulsiveness, confusion, and horror. The noble poet would convey the idea that the benignant Creator of the universe, was an omni-

potent being, who delighted rather in dissonance and deformity than in harmony and beauty. He never looks at the magnificence of nature with the pregnant soul and overflowing heart of a christian worshipper. There is none of that pure fervour in his poetry which elevates the spirit of man to his God, in whom it recognises the origin of all that is good, and beautiful, and lovely. Tenderness and pathos are undeniably present in many of his compositions, but they are the tenderness and pathos of mere passion, not of lofty emotion. All breathes of the animal, the spiritual phases of humanity are darkened by the intensity of animal sympathy. The beauties of the external world are arrayed in a colouring oftensplendid and imposing, but it seems as if laid on by the hand of some potent magician, rather than by that of the divinity. It stirs the heart, but does not exalt it.

The stanzas quoted from the far-famed poem of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, have been frequently produced as a noble exemplification of Lord Byron's genius, but I trust it has been clearly shown that they cannot stand the test of severe and inflexible criticism. They are not marked with the signet of truth. I have given them at length, because of their very high celebrity as a specimen of descriptive poetry, in order to show how far they fall short of the simple grandeur, the often homely but perfect fidelity and unaffected sublimity of the Hebrew. In the one all is shadowy, murky magnificence; in the other all is clear, inspiring effulgence; the one appals, the other elevates.

If the admirers of poetry can really read with rapture the writings of Lord Byron, simply on account of the rare beauties with which they abound, there surely seems no just reason why such readers should not find equal—nay far higher gratification in the poetry of the Bible. The study of the latter moreover, beyond the gratification afforded by the poetic treasures with which it is so abundantly and so richly stored, would certainly lead to the acquisition of much more spiritual wisdom than the study of the former. Take the poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures where you will, it incomparably surpasses that of any uninspired production, though that poetry, notwithstanding the inspiration of its subject, is the sole production of human genius; the medium through which divine revelation is communicated to the mass of mankind is human, the revelation only is divine. The prophecies are transmitted to us in the language of the prophets who uttered them; the poetry in which they are clothed is exclusively their own. I shall have more to say on this subject in a future page.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Herder's version of the Thanksgiving Ode.

HERDER has some very interesting remarks upon the thanksgiving ode of Moses, and these, together with his translation, I shall give without further preface.

"The passage of the Red Sea," he says, "produced the most ancient and sonorous song of triumph which we have in this language. It is a choral ode, one voice describing perhaps the acts themselves, those of the chorus striking in, and, as it were, re-echoing the sentiment. Its structure is simple, full of alliteration and rhyme, which I could not give in our language without doing violence to it, for the Hebrew, from the simplicity of its forms, is full of such harmonious correspondencies of sound. Flowing and prolonged words, but few in number, float upon the air, and terminate for the most part in an obscure monosyllabic sound, that formed perhaps the burden of the chorus. Here is a feeble imitation of the untranslatable but most ancient triumphal ode in any language.

*"Song of Moses at the Red Sea.**

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel
 This song unto the Lord,
 And they spake, saying,
 I will sing unto the Lord,
 For he hath triumphed gloriously ;
 The horse and his rider hath he thrown
 Into the depths of the sea.
 The Lord is my strength and my song,
 He is become my salvation.
 He is my God and I will praise him,
 My father's God and I will exalt him.
 Jehovah is a man of war,
 Jehovah is his name.
 Pharaoh's chariots and his host
 Hath he cast into the sea,
 The choicest of his captains
 Are sunk in the reedy sea.

The floods have covered them,
 They sank into the depths
 Like a stone.

Thy right hand, O Jehovah,
 Hath shown itself glorious in majesty.
 Thy right hand, O Jehovah,
 Hath dashed in pieces the enemy.
 By thine exalted power
 Thou dashest those that rise against thee.
 Thou sentest forth thy wrath,
 It consumed them like stubble.

At the blast of thy nostrils
 The waters were gathered together.
 The swelling flood stood up like heaps,
 The waves were congealed
 In the depths of the sea.

The enemy said, I will pursue,
 Will seize, will divide the spoil ;
 My soul shall glut itself with them ;
 My sword will I draw out
 And utterly destroy them.

Then breathed thy wind,
 The sea covered them,
 They sank as lead
 In the mighty waters.

* Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, vol. 2, page 65.

Who is like to thee, O Lord !
 Who, among the gods ?
 Who is like thee glorious in holiness,
 Fearful in praises, doing wonders !
 Thou stretchedst out thy hand,
 The earth swallowed them up.
 With gentle hand thou leddest forth
 The people which thou hadst redeemed.
 Thou guidest them with strength
 Unto thy holy habitation.

The nations hear thereof and tremble,
 Grief seizes on the dwellers in Philistia,
 The princes of Edom are amazed,
 The heroes of Moab are seized with dread,
 The dwellers in Canaan are melting away.

Let fear and dread fall upon them,
 The terrors of death from thy mighty arm.
 Let them be motionless as a stone
 Till thy people, O Lord, pass over,
 Till thy people pass, whom thou hast redeemed.

Bring them in, O Lord,
 Plant thy people
 Upon the mount of thine inheritance,
 The place of thy habitation
 Which thou hast made ready for thyself,
 The sanctuary which thy hands have made.
 Jehovah reigns for ever and ever.

“The song perhaps terminated here, and the following was only a brief recapitulation of the contents.

Forth marched the horse of Pharoah and his chariots,
 He went with his horsemen down into the sea.
 Then brought Jehovah upon them
 The returning waves of the sea.
 The tribes of Israel passed dry
 Through the midst of the sea.

“So that these lines were a sort of brief memorial, such as every one might retain in memory, concerning the whole event. If passages occur in this song such as we should suppose could not yet have been sung there, let it be borne in mind that the temple, the sanctuary,

and the land to which they were journeying, were, in the mind of God and of Moses, already present; and that Moses by these anticipated, as it were, in triumph the institutions and regulations which were to be formed.

“ This song, of which I have given but a feeble echo, gave their tone to the triumphal songs of the Hebrews, as the song of Deborah and the sixty-eighth psalm evince. The rhythmical movement is animated by the same cœsuras and cadences, and by the same lively correspondencies of sound. The frequent exclamations, the oft-recurring—

Praise to Jehovah !
Sing praises to Jehovah !

the excitations addressed to the hearers, or the singers themselves, which at intervals interrupt, or rather animate the current of thoughts anew, form, as it were, the stave, on which the historical song is arranged. In the Psalms, the hallelujah grew out of this, as an animating and joyous shout of the chorus, known to many nations in nearly the same form, and by the Hebrews consecrated to their Jah or Jehovah.”

Now it is sufficiently evident, from the extract here given, that Herder not only admitted the existence of Hebrew metre, but considered the thanksgiving ode of Moses as composed in rhyme; and the authority of this eminent Hebrew scholar and sagacious critic will no doubt have great weight with many readers, who, with Le Clerc, hold that most of the poetry of the Scriptures was written in rhyme. Into this view of the

question I do not now intend to enter, having already expressed my opinion at length* in a former page. The manner in which Herder breaks the whole of this grand ode into hemistichs, in my opinion, gives to it a rhythmical flow and spirit not found in an equal degree in any other translation. As a whole, I prefer it to Kennicott's or any version I have seen, though there are certainly passages which fall below our common translation in literal truth and simple energy. No one, I think, can read it without feeling that this noble production merits all the praise I have bestowed upon it.

I have been the more particular in giving the two versions of this divine song, admitted by a host of critics as deserving of the highest commendation, in order that the general reader may see, under the sanction of high learned authorities, that what they may perhaps have been accustomed to peruse as mere ordinary prose contains some of the finest poetry which language has been employed to produce; for I feel satisfied that if the Bible were taken up by people of common penetration even as a book of the highest literary merit, it would not only have the effect of spiritualizing their minds, but of improving their tastes, since they could not fail to discover in it the noblest emanations of human genius. There is no just reason why we should not delight in the sublime eloquence and poetical beauty of the sacred writings, as well as venerate the divine truths which they contain; on the contrary, I am

* See chap. iv.

persuaded that an encouragement of the one will tend to confirm in our minds the vast importance of the other. They who begin by only admiring, will end in believing; I would therefore fain show how much there is to admire, in that inspired volume, which contains the oracles of God.

CHAPTER XXV.

*Obscure passage in the twenty-first chapter of Numbers.
Song of the well. Various versions. The book of the
wars of the Lord.*

THE next specimen of Hebrew poetry, which follows in order in the Pentateuch, is a very obscure passage in the twenty-first chapter of Numbers, which appears to refer to some chronicle then extant, and which was probably written in Hebrew verse. This seems to be the prevailing conjecture. That chronicle is thus mentioned in the chapter referred to at the tenth verse. "Wherefore it is said, in the book of the wars of the Lord, what he did in the Red Sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwellings of Ar and lieth upon the border of Moab."

The book here named, according to Dr. Lightfoot, "seems to have been some book of remembrance and direction, written by Moses for Joshua's private instruction for the management of the wars after him."

Of this book Herder says*—"When Moses, compelled by necessity, smote Amalek he began a book of the wars of Jehovah, which was afterwards continued. Only a few poetical passages of it, however, remain. A passage from the triumph of Moses over Amalek.†

* Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, vol. ii. p. 179. † Exod. xvii. 14.

I will blot out, utterly blot out
The memory of Amalek from under heaven.

“The altar which Moses built and which he called ‘Jehovah, my banner of triumph,’ has in like manner a poetical explanation:—

Because my hand was raised to Jehovah’s throne,
Jehovah will have war with Amalek
From generation to generation.

“It was not the hand of Amalek, but that of Moses, which was raised to Jehovah during the battle. It was supported by a stone, and this suggested the idea of an altar, which was called ‘the banner of victory.’ As a conqueror, Moses had raised his hand to the throne of Jehovah. We find afterwards other poems from this book.”

The words quoted from the “book of the wars of the Lord,” especially “what he did at the Red Sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,” have baffled the sagacity of the ablest expositors. I shall not therefore attempt to perplex the reader with conjectures of learned scholiasts, as the question is of little importance, further than as it shows the existence of written authentic records in those early times. The Israelites being no doubt acquainted with the document from which Moses quoted on this occasion, for it is but reasonable to suppose that he had published it among those for whose benefit it was intended, the passage could not fail to be perfectly intelligible to them, and that it is not so to us matters little, since had it been of vital importance the inspired author would have, no doubt, rendered its meaning more obvious. It

manifestly refers to some mere local event of no especial moment now; we consequently lose nothing by the difficulty which it opposes to all positive illustration. It consists simply of a short broken fragment, in which the construction appears to be metrical, and this would seem to have been the general form of chronicles in those remote ages; they were most probably written in verse, in order that they might be the more readily impressed upon the memory: there is not however sufficient poetical attraction, owing to the meaning being so utterly impenetrable, to render it a subject of critical discussion; nevertheless, Dr. Kennicott's observations upon the passage are well deserving of attention.

"This one chapter," he says, "has three pieces of poetry, either fragments or complete; and poetry, seldom found in an historical narrative, may be here accounted for from the exuberance of joy that must have affected these wearied travellers, when arriving thus happily near their journey's end. What occurs first is in the fourteenth verse, and has often been called the fragment of an old Amorite song. But it may have been Amorite, or Moabite, or neither, for the subject-matter of it, as it is generally understood, if indeed it can be said to be understood at all. The words usually supposed to contain this fragment, do not signify, as in our English version, 'What he did in the Red Sea, or in the brooks of Arnon.' Without enumerating the many interpretations given by others, I shall offer a new one, which seems to make good sense, and a sense very pertinent.

“Observe, first, that there must have been a *place* called *Suph* near the conflux of the Arnon and Jordan; because Moses, whilst in that last station, begins Deuteronomy with saying, he was on this side, that is, on the east of Jordan, over against *Suph*. By this word is not here meant the *Red Sea*; partly, because that has everywhere else the word for sea before it, and partly because of the great distance of the Red Sea now from Moses. The single word, therefore, signifies here some place in itself obscure, because nowhere mentioned but in these two passages; and yet we cannot wonder that Moses should mention it twice, as the word *Suph*, introduced in speaking of the two last encampments, recalled to mind the *Sea of Suph*, so glorious to Israel, near the beginning of their march towards Canaan.

“Moses had now led Israel from the Red Sea to the river Arnon, through many dreadful dangers, partly from hostile nations, partly from themselves; such dangers as no other people ever experienced, and such as no people could have surmounted, without the signal favour of the Almighty. And here, just before the battles with Sihon and Og, he reminds them of Pharaoh, &c., and he asserts that *in the history of the wars it shall be recorded* that Jehovah, who had triumphantly brought Israel through the *Sea of Suph* near Egypt at first, had now conducted him to *Suph* near Arnon; that

Jehovah went with him to Suph,
And he came to the streams of Arnon.”

At the seventeenth verse of the chapter containing the extract from the book of the wars of the Lord, commences a kind of song, which, although likewise obscure, is nevertheless susceptible of easier interpretation, and has greater claims to notice as a poetical effusion of some beauty, though far inferior to what we have been lately considering. In our Bibles we find it thus rendered.—“ Then Israel sang this song :—

“ Spring up, O well ; sing ye unto it :
The princes digged the well,
The nobles of the people digged it,
By the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves.

“ And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah, and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh towards Jeshimon.”* The marginal translation of the second member of the first line, “ answer ye to it,” is a better reading than that above given, as the manner of singing songs in those primitive times evidently was to have an alternation of voices, one part of the quire singing one portion, and this being answered by another. Dr. Adam Clarke proposes the following judicious reading of this song, accompanied with a description of the mode of singing it :—

Spring up, O well ! answer ye to it :
that is, repeat the other parts of the song.
The well, the princes searched it out ;
this was the answer.

* Numbers xxi. 17—20.

The nobles of the people have digged it
By a decree, upon their own borders :

this was the chorus.

“The general meaning of the passage,” writes Dr. Kennicott, “seems to be this, that at some distance from the city of Ar, by which the Israelites were to pass (Deut ii. 18), they came to a well of uncommon size and magnificence, which seems to have been sought out, built up, and adorned for the public, by the rulers of Moab. And it is no wonder that on their arrival at such a well, they should look upon it as a blessing from heaven, and speak of it as a new miracle in their favour.”

Those who follow our translation, understand the meaning to be, either that the water sprang up with such ease and speed, that the princes no sooner directed with their staves where to dig than their labours were successful; or that the princes and those who bore staves, the badges of dignity, joined with the multitude in digging it.*

The following is Dr. Kennicott’s translation of this obscure composition.

Then Israel sang this song ;—
Spring up, O well, sing ye thereto !
The well ! princes searched it out ;
The nobles of the people have digged it
By their decree, by their act of government.
So, after the wilderness was Mattanah !
And after Mattanah were Nahaliel !
And after Nahaliel were Bamoth !
And after Bamoth was the valley,
Where, in the country of Moab,
Appeareth the top of Pisgah,
Which is over against Jeshimon.

* See Dodd’s note.

Now it can scarcely escape observation that in this passage the poetical costume is clear and definite. The well is apostrophized—"spring up, O well!" Then there is an abrupt transition to the people digging it—"sing ye thereto," that is, raise a shout of exultation at having so unexpectedly found water in the wilderness. Next follows a declaration that it has been discovered by their princes—the greatest among their community—or, according to Dr. Kennicott, that it was "sought out, built up and adorned by the rulers of Moab," and this, I confess, appears to me the true interpretation.

The nobles of the people have digged it,
By their decree, by their act of government.

This was no doubt the burden of the song, and was sung by the united voices of the multitude. The names of places which follow, were probably halting-stations in the wilderness where the Israelites encamped, though the learned expositor just named, supposes them to have had a figurative signification, as, in his version, they follow the song in a poetical series of two distichs and a triplet. "No wonder,"* says he, "they should sing in poetic rapture that after the wilderness was Mattanah, the gift of God—meaning the great well in Moab, dug by public authority; and no wonder that after such a gift there were Nahaliel—blessed streams by which they passed, till they came to Bamoth, the high places whence perhaps those streams descended.

* See Remarks on select passages of the Old Testament.

And the thanksgiving ends, where the blessing was no longer wanted, on their coming down into the valley, along the banks of Arnon, which was then the north boundary of Moab."

"It was one among the imperishable and peculiar merits of Moses, that surrounded as he was by superstitious tribes, he directly opposed in his system of laws superstitious practices, and did not tolerate enchantments, magical imprecations, and blessings. The song of the well, which belongs to this period, was introduced perhaps for this very purpose, to guard against the superstition of the people.

Spring up, O well,
Sing ye unto it.
The princes digged the well,
The nobles pointed it out
With their sceptres,
With their staves.

"Perhaps Moses caused the place to be marked by the staves of the leaders, that no enchanter's rod might be permitted to approach it. Balaam himself was obliged to confess, that 'enchantment had no power against Israel, and that no benediction could prevail against Jacob.' Considered in this light, therefore, the story is to the honour of Israel; Moses shows, by the example of the most celebrated soothsayer, how vain and how subject to the control of God was this art, which he had forbidden."* It is curious to observe how translators differ in their rendering of this difficult song. Herder has

* See *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*; vol. ii. pp. 171, 172.

preserved a construction peculiar to the metrical compositions of the Hebrews in the last four hemistichs. The subject does not proceed in its natural sequence, but is interrupted by a new one, and the two subjects form together a pair of alternate parallelisms, an hyperbation often employed by the Hebrew writers, which would in their natural order stand as follows—

The princes digged the well
With their sceptres,
The nobles pointed it out
With their staves.

This is a very comprehensive rendering ; it is quite consonant to the spirit and character of similar compositions found in the Pentateuch, and, indeed, likewise in the latter portions of the sacred writings.

In spite of all that has been said to remove the obscurities of this ancient song, it must nevertheless be confessed that these difficulties still, in a great measure, remain. Its poetical pretensions are unquestionably not of the first order.

The apostrophe has always been a favourite resource with writers of verse, from the patriarchal times to the present, and in this song we have an agreeable specimen of it. Poets of all nations and of all ages have resorted to it as an affective expedient of their art, and one of the finest examples of it with which I am acquainted, occurs in Shakspeare's tragedy of King Henry the Fourth, second part, act the third, scene the first. It is an apostrophe to sleep :—

Sleep, gentle sleep,
 Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
 That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
 And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
 Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
 Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
 And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
 Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
 Under the canopies of costly state,
 And lulled with sounds of sweetest melody?
 Oh! thou dull god! why liest thou with the vile,
 In loathsome beds; and leav'st the kingly couch,
 A watch-case or a common 'larum-bell?
 Wilt thou, upon the high and giddy mast,
 Seal up the ship-boy's eyes and rock his brains
 In cradle of the rude imperious surge,
 And in the visitation of the winds,
 Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
 Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them,
 With deafening clamours, in the slippery shrouds,
 That, with the hurly, death itself awakes?
 Can'st thou, O partial sleep! give thy repose
 To the wet sea-boy, in an hour so rude,
 And in the calmest and most stillest night,
 With all appliances and means to boot,
 Deny it to a king?

I shall conclude this chapter with Calmet's observations upon the *book of the wars of the Lord*. "This," says he,* "is cited by Moses, Numbers xxi. 14, 'What he did in the Red Sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,' &c. *The book of the wars of the Lord*, related some particulars which happened when the Hebrews passed those brooks.

"Enquiry has been made what this book was. Some think it was a work of greater antiquity than Moses, containing a recital of wars to which the Israelites were parties in Egypt, or out of Egypt, before their exodus under Moses. Indeed, it is most natural to quote a book which

* See Dictionary of the Bible, art. Bible.

is more ancient than the author who is writing, particularly in support of any extraordinary and miraculous fact. The Hebrew of this passage is perplexed: 'As it is written in the book of the wars of the Lord; at Vaheb in Suphah; and in the brooks of Arnon,' &c. We do not know who or what this Vaheb is. M. Boivin, senior, thought it meant some prince, who had the government of the country, and was defeated by the Israelites before they came out of Egypt; others think Vaheb was a king of Moab, overcome by Sihon king of the Amorites.

"Grotius, instead of Vaheb, reads Moab, and translates it—'Sihon beat Moab at Suphah.' I should rather read Zared, instead of Vaheb, after this manner: 'As it is written in the book of the wars of the Lord, the Hebrews came from Zared, and encamped at Suphah and about the stream of the brook of Arnon,' &c. Zared we know, Numbers xxi. 12, 13; from whence they came to Suphah, which is mentioned Deuteronomy i. 1; and perhaps Numbers xxii. 36. From hence they came to the brook of Arnon, which flows down to Ar, the capital city of the Moabites. This is cited very seasonably in this place to confirm what is said in preceding verses. Zared may easily be made from Vaheb in the Hebrew.

"Others are of opinion that the book of the wars of the Lord is the book of Numbers itself, in which this passage is cited, or that of Joshua, or of Judges; they translate, 'it is said, in the recital of the wars of the Lord,' &c. Others suppose that this narration of the wars of the Lord, is

contained in the hundred and thirty-fifth and the hundred and thirty-sixth Psalms. Others, that the book of the wars of the Lord, and the book of Jasher referred to, Joshua x. 13, are the same. Cornelius, a Lapide, conjectures that this citation is added to the text of Moses, and that the book of the wars of the Lord, related the wars of the Israelites under Moses, Joshua, the Judges, &c., and therefore was later than Moses. Lastly, it may be said that Moses either wrote himself, or procured to be written a book, wherein he related all the wars of the Lord. This book was continued under the judges and the kings, and was called *Annals*; and from these *Annals* were composed those sacred books, which contain the histories of the Old Testament: this *book of the wars of the Lord* is not now in being, yet we have no reason to doubt of its authenticity."

CHAPTER XXVI.

War-song of the Amorites. Applied by Moses to his own conquest. Dr. Kennicott's and Herder's versions of this song.

IN the chapter* containing the Hebrew song to the well, there follows, from the twenty-seventh to the thirty-first verse, a poem of considerable beauty, as will be presently seen. It stands thus in the common version of our Bibles:—
“Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say,

Come unto Heshbon !
Let the city of Sihon be built and prepared :
For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon,
A flame from the city of Sihon :
It hath consumed Ar of Moab,
And the lords of the high places of Arnon.
Woe to thee, Moab !
Thou art undone, O people of Chemosh :
He hath given his sons that escaped,
And his daughters, into captivity
Unto Sihon, king of the Amorites.
We have shot at them ;
Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon,
And we have laid them waste even unto Nophah,
Which reacheth unto Medeba.

This is evidently a war-song, written in commemoration of some success obtained against a former king of Moab by the Amorites, and now quoted by Moses to celebrate his own success.

* Numbers xxi.

It seems to have been a song in some repute at that time, it being quoted as the production of one of the poets of that period referred to by Moses as "they who speak in proverbs," and no doubt deservedly popular. It would appear, indeed, to have been a composition of considerable celebrity from the words which immediately precede it. "Wherefore they who speak in proverbs say;" by whom we shall understand bards or wise men, as the poets in those, and, indeed, in ages long subsequent, were called. There can be no doubt, from this song, that compositions not inspired, in which intellect of a high order was displayed, existed in those days, though they have long since passed into oblivion, together with a vast mass of human records, which did not contain within themselves the principles of enduring vitality.

"This song," says Bishop Patrick, "seems to have been composed by some of the Amorites upon the victory which Sihon obtained over the Moabites, particularly upon the taking of Heshbon, which I suppose he besieged immediately upon the routing of their army. This Moses thought good to insert in his history, as an evidence that this country belonged to the Amorites when the Israelites subdued it. Thus he quotes a common saying about Nimrod, to justify what he says of his greatness (see Gen. x. 9)."

It would seem, from the whole tenor of this fragment, that the country now subdued by the Israelites, that is, at the time of which Moses is writing, was previously in possession of the Amorites, who had taken it from the Moabites,

and composed this triumphal song upon the occasion :—

Come unto Heshbon !
Let the city of Sihon be built and prepared.

The poet here represents the victorious Amorites as addressing each other in a strain of triumphant rejoicing, and declaring that the Moabitish city of Heshbon, now become, by right of conquest, the city of the Amoritish king, Sihon, shall be repaired and rendered immediately fit for the royal residence.

For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon,
A flame from the city of Sihon :
It hath consumed Ar of Moab,
And the lords of the high places of Arnon.

The bard now rises into a poetical orgasm, and predicts the conquest of the entire country by the army of Sihon marching out of Heshbon, fire being emblematical of desolation. He then speaks of that as being done which he predicts shall be done, the present being frequently employed for the future in prophetic poetry, among which this song may be classed ; for although the bard who composed it was not inspired, and therefore his prediction never came to pass, it being written in accordance with his *hopes* of the future, not with his *knowledge* of it, yet it was intended, no doubt, by him to be prophetic.

The lords of the high places of Arnon

is understood to mean the princes of Moab, who dwelt in the strong forts of their country, built

upon the heights in the neighbourhood of the river Arnon, and difficult of access by an invading army.

Woe to thee, Moab !
 Thou art undone, O people of Chemosh :
 He hath given his sons that escaped,
 And his daughters, into captivity
 Unto Sihon, king of the Amorites.

The author of the song still goes on depicting the future calamities of Moab. He calls them people of Chemosh, because this was the name of their divinity, whom he shows was unable to deliver his worshippers out of their tribulation. The impotence of their god is at once shown, together with the vanity of idolatrous worship. In this passage, the bard of the Amorites is, though undesignedly, no doubt, as severe against his own nation as against the vanquished Moabites.

We have shot at them,
 that is, we have vanquished them ;

Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon,
 And we have laid them waste even unto Nophah,
 Which reacheth unto Medeba.

As if he had said, 'the glory of the Moabites is departed, from one end of the country to the other.' Dr. Kennicott's version of this poem is extremely happy:—

FIRST PART.

Come ye to Heshbon, let it be rebuilt ;
 The city of Sihon, let it be established.
 For from Heshbon the fire went out,

And a flame from the city of Sihon :
It hath consumed the city of Moab
With the lords of the heights of Arnon.

SECOND PART.

Alas for thee, O Moab !
Thou hast perished, O people of Chemosh !
He hath given up his fugitive sons,
And his daughters, into captivity
To the king of the Amorites, Sihon.

THIRD PART.

But on them we lifted destruction
From Heshbon even to Dibon ;
We have destroyed even to Nophah :
The fire did reach to Medibah.

“ The ode is here divided into three parts. The first six lines record with bitter irony the late insults of Sihon and his subjects over the conquered Moabites. The second part, comprised in the five lines following the first part, expresses the compassion of the Israelites over the desolations of Moab, with a severe sarcasm against their god Chemosh, who had abandoned his votaries in their distress, or was unable to rescue them from the hands of their foes. The third part, embracing the four concluding lines, sets forth the revenge taken by Israel upon the whole country of Sihon, from Heshbon to Dibon, and from Nophah even to Medeba.”* If this latter observation be exclusively true of the Israelitish conquest, it is clear that the third part cannot belong to the original Amoritish song, but must have been added by Moses. It is, however, probable that Moses merely applied

* See Dr. Adam Clarke's note.

the original words to his own conquest, which they suited without any variation.

The great Jewish lawgiver would not, it is to be presumed, have employed this poem on the present occasion to signalize his own victory, had he not thought highly of it; and even without the sanction of so eminent an authority, we cannot fail to perceive that it is a composition of great merit. The first two couplets, it will be observed, are favourable specimens of the usual gradational parallelism, in which the sense beautifully graduates :—

Come ye to Heshbon, let it be rebuilt;
The city of Sihon, let it be established.
For from Heshbon the fire went out,
And a flame from the city of Sihon.

In the first verse of the first couplet, Heshbon is simply mentioned; in the next, it is designated as the capital of the Amoritish king. Although there is a strict correspondency between the first members of the two lines, we cannot fail to perceive how the latter member rises above the former in significancy and force. So likewise is the term “established” an advance upon “rebuilt.” It was not only to be repaired from the ravages of war, but put in a condition to become the residence of the monarch. In the second distich there is precisely the same duplication of phrases as in the first; “Heshbon” recurring in the first verse, and the “city of Sihon” in the second. “Flame,” too, is an advance upon “fire,” the one being the other excited into active combustion. In the third

distich, although the variation is greater, the parallelism is nevertheless apparent, but much less distinctly developed than in the two preceding passages:—

It hath consumed the city of Moab,
With the lords of the heights of Arnon.

That is, it has not only destroyed the capital, but the whole court, the nobles and princes of the land, who occupied the strong-holds of the mountains in which the river Arnon took its rise. Here the utter extinction of the political power of the Moabites is signified, in terms extremely emphatic, and though this did not immediately come to pass, they may be said virtually to have ceased as a political community within a comparatively short period of this time, for after the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, little seems to be known concerning them, though they are mentioned by Isaiah,* who, at the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah, threatens them with a calamity which was to happen three years after his prediction. They are likewise referred to by Amos,† who foretold great miseries of them, and by Jeremiah.‡ Nevertheless, they ceased to be a distinguished people after the time of Jehoshaphat.

Heshbon, which, previously to their subjugation by Sihon, king of the Amorites, had been the capital of the Moabites, was “a celebrated city beyond Jordan, otherwise Esbus, Chesbon, Chasphon, Chascor. It was, says Eusebius,

* Chap. xv. † i. 13, &c. ‡ ix. 26, xii. 14, 15, xxv. 11, 12, xlvi. 47.

twenty miles east from Jordan (Joshua xiii. 17.) It was given to Reuben; but was transferred to Gad, and by Gad to the Levites. It had been conquered from the Moabites by Sihon, and was taken by the Israelites a little before the death of Moses. After the ten tribes were transplanted into the country beyond Jordan, the Moabites recovered it. Pliny, lib. v. cap. 11, assigns it to Arabia. Solomon speaks of the pool of Heshbon (Canticles vii. 4). Maccabees says, that the lake of Caspis, or Heshbon, was two furlongs, or three hundred paces, broad. (2 Mac. xii. 16.)*

Of the five hemistichs forming the second part of this song, an explanation has already been given. The Moabites are apostrophized as the people of Chemosh, a heathen God, because they worshipped it. Nothing can be more bitter than the sarcasm. Chemosh was an idol, of which numerous unsatisfactory conjectures have been offered by commentators, without determining its identity. Many suppose it to have been the same as Baal-Peor, and that both are identical with the Priapus of the Greek Pantheon, for both were worshipped with the most abominable rites. Milton seems to have been of this opinion. He speaks of it thus in the first book of *Paradise Lost*:—

Next Chemos, the obscene dread of Moab's sons;
Peor his other name, when he enticed
Israel in Sittim, on their march from Nile,
To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe.

This idea, of Chemosh being an obscene idol,

* Calmet's Dictionary, art. Heshbon.

greatly strengthens the bitterness of the irony expressed in this part of the song. Here the Moabites are addressed as worshippers of a deity, who was approached with rites so revolting as to excite the contempt and disgust of a heathen community. Even the Amorites, a people descended from Amorrhæus, the fourth son of Canaan, and therefore from a sufficiently corrupt stock, looked upon the worship of the Moabites with detestation, which is strongly expressed in the triumphal song employed by Moses to celebrate his own victory.

The first line of the third part of this poem, as Dr. Kennicott has rendered it, is incomparably fine:—

But on them we lifted destruction.

This is truly a sublime image, suggesting the idea of lifting, with great pains and labour, a vast overwhelming agent, which so crushed as utterly to destroy whatever it was cast upon. It is, in my judgment, inexpressibly grand.

There is good reason for supposing that this piece of Amoritish poetry constituted part of the ancient chronicles of the country, metre being the form in which public records were preserved in those primitive ages, because it was a form much less exposed to the chance of alteration than prose: it was consequently found the best vehicle for the conservation of past and passing events. In the earliest ages of the world, the language of the poet was likewise that of the historian, for the reason just stated, likewise of the rhetorician, and, in general, of all who

studied the arts of literary composition. Cadmus, Pherecydes, and Hecataeus, are the first who wrote in prose. Whatever was composed for the instruction of the people, was composed in verse, the former being the language of the esoterick, and the latter of the exoterick, learning, so to speak, of the earliest times. "The ancients," says Strabo, "considered poetry as a kind of first philosophy, proper to regulate the life from the tenderest infancy, to inculcate good manners, and to govern the human passions and actions in the most agreeable way. . Thus," he adds, "the Greeks afterwards made use of poetry in their public academies, for the instruction of their youth; not merely because this method was entertaining, but because they thought it proper to form their children to modesty.*

It will be perceived, that in the specimens of sacred poetry produced in these pages, their obscurity often abridges their beauty, because, in poetry, it is necessary, in order to create a high perception of delight, that the mind should be clearly and vividly impressed with the meaning intended to be conveyed by the words in which it is clothed. The obscurity, however, in these fragments does not arise from any want of power in their authors to express themselves intelligibly, but principally from the allusions made to events known only to persons then existing, and to customs which have long passed from human societies. It will therefore neces-

* See Patrick.

sarily follow, that, at this remote period, there will be found many things in the early Hebrew metrical writings which to us, being at an interval so immensely distant, must naturally be obscure and unintelligible.

I shall now conclude this chapter with Herder's version of the Amoritish song :—

Come ye into Heshbon,
Build and strengthen Sihon.
A fire went out of Heshbon,
A flame from the city Sihon,
Which consumed the mountains of Moab,
The dwellers in the high places of Arnon.

Woe unto thee, Moab!
Thou art undone, people of Chemosh.
Thy sons must be fugitives,
Thy daughters become captives
To Sihon, king of the Amorites.

Their yoke is now broken
From Heshbon unto Dibon.
We laid waste unto Nophah,
We laid them waste unto Medbah.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The earlier Hebrew poets inferior to those of subsequent times. Their compositions, nevertheless, of a very high order. The poetical beauties of the Bible little appreciated generally. Ezekiel's vision. The metrical structure traced by Herder in portions of the Pentateuch not commonly considered poetical. A passage from the third chapter of Genesis in confirmation of this view.

THE specimens of Hebrew poetry hitherto considered in this work, with the exception of some portions of the prophecies of Jacob, and the thanksgiving ode composed by Moses upon the subject of his and the Israelites' final deliverance from Egyptian bondage, signalized by their miraculous passage of the Red Sea, are undoubtedly among the least attractive in the sacred volume. They show the characteristics of a ruder age, and though strikingly marked with the unequivocal lineaments of metrical composition, those lineaments are nevertheless of a sterner and more homely expression than we find exhibited, in similar compositions, subsequent to the memorable exodus of the posterity of Jacob, from that land of tyranny in which they had so long suffered under the harsh despotism of a Pharaoh "who knew not Joseph."

As we proceed, the examples upon which I shall have to expatiate are of the very highest order, all strongly developing the grandest attributes of poetry.

How it happens that so many, claiming to be persons of taste, who can readily appreciate the beauties of those productions of different countries upon which time has placed the signet of perpetuity, should fail to be animated with a sense of real admiration by the poetry of the sacred volume, can only be accounted for upon the presumption that there is a fashion in admiration as well as in dress, and that the passion is merely assumed in accordance with established usage ; for I really believe that not one reader in twenty, who affects to admire the metrical productions of Homer, Virgil, Milton, Dante, Goethe, and of a host of other writers, has a just apprehension of their excellencies, else I cannot imagine that he should fail to perceive and appreciate poetical treasures so rich and abounding as those of the inspired records.

Such a reader need not go to heathen writers for that gratification which the finest poetry can never fail to impart, as it may be discovered in its most exuberant magnificence in the sacred volume. There are many highly endowed persons, lovers of literature and ardent admirers of poetry, who have yet to learn that the deepest mines of poetic wealth are to be found in that book which they have perhaps never yet condescended to open. To such persons the advice of an old anonymous poet may be timely offered :—

Put off the sinner and put on the saint,
 A rotten post doth not become the paint ;
 Who needs will tread on holy ground, 'tis meet
 He leave his shoes behind, and wash his feet.

Seek not thy pleasure in another's shame,
 Nor spoil the ointment of thy neighbour's name :
 From nakedness the modest turn their head ;
 Who paddles in the dirt is but ill-bred.

Banish all baser fears, let them not rest
 In the more noble mansion of thy breast ;
 Who is a bondman unto slavish fears,
 His conscience at another's pleasure wears.

Fly such as frolic it in cups of wine,
 Why should another's health endanger thine ?
 The drunkard is a vessel weakly manned,
 That's wrecked and cast away upon dry land.

If in the family thou art the best,
 Pray oft, and be the mouth unto the rest :
 Whom God hath made the heads of families,
 He hath made priests to offer sacrifice.

Daily let part of Holy Writ be read ;
 Let, as the body, so the soul, have bread ;
 For look how many souls in thy house be,
 With just as many souls God trusteth thee.

The day that God calls his make not thine own,
 By sports or play, though 'tis a custom grown ;
 God's day of mercy whose doth profane,
 God's day of judgment doth for him remain.*

Besides the fragments of Hebrew poetry in the Pentateuch to which I have already directed the reader's attention, there are occasional instances of a hemistich, sometimes of a distich, being interwoven with the narrative. One instance, mentioned by Michaelis, is the twenty-fourth verse of the third chapter of Genesis :

* These stanzas are by an anonymous poet of the seventeenth century.

"So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubims, and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life."

"That Moses," says Michaelis, "has preserved many relics of this kind, is evident from the fragments of verse which are scattered throughout his writings, and which are very distinguishable from his usual language. Such is that which he relates, Genesis iii. 24, of the cherubs placed at the east of the garden of Eden; under which appellation I understand to be meant, not angels, but the *Equi tonantes* of the Greek and Latin poets; the reasons for which opinion I have more fully explained in the commentaries of the Royal Society at Gottengen, tom. i. p. 175. The passage is, without doubt, poetical.

He placed before the garden Cherubim (thundering horses), and a flaming sword;
To keep the way of the Tree of Life.

In plain terms, the dread of the frequent tempests, and daily thunders, deterred men from that tract in which Paradise was situated, lest they should eat of the Tree of Life." This idea of thundering horses is combated at considerable length by Herder, who does not dispute the passage referred to by Michaelis to be poetical, but altogether dissents from his notion of the Cherubim.* He has given a version of Ezechiel's vision of God enthroned above the Cherubim, so happily rendered by his American translator that I think it well worth transferring to these pages

* See Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, vol. i. pp. 141—157.

I looked, and lo ! a whirlwind from the north
 Came sweeping onward, a vast cloud, that rolled
 Its volumes, charged with gleaming fire, along,
 And cast its dazzling splendours all around.
 Now from within shone forth, what seemed the glow
 Of gold and silver, molten in the flame !
 And in the midst thereof the form expressed,
 As of a four-fold living thing—a shape
 That yet contained the semblance of a man.
 With four-fold visage each, and each four wings,
 On upright limbs and cloven feet they stood,
 And shone with splendour as of burnished brass.
 Withdrawn beneath their wings, on every side,
 Were human hands, for each four-sided seemed,
 And four-fold had their faces and their wings.
 Then, wing to wing, and each to each close joined,
 They turned not in their going, but went forth,
 Advancing each with look and course unchanged.

In all the four-fold visaged four was seen
 The face of man ; the right a lion, and an ox
 The left distinguished, and to all the four,
 Belonged an eagle's visage. By itself
 Distinct, their faces and their wings they each
 Extended upward, joining thus, it seemed,
 Two wings for flight, while two their bodies veiled.
 With course direct and forward each advanced :
 Whither the spirit moved they went, nor ever turned.
 The several living forms, like glowing coals
 Appeared. What seemed the flame of torches played
 Between them, and the dazzling light of fire.
 From out the fire went gleaming lightnings forth ;
 And quick as lightning's flash, the living forms
 Were here and there, went forth and back returned.
 Above their heads, high over-arching, seemed
 An azure firmament outspread, like clear
 Transparent crystal, that inspired with awe.
 Approaching near the firmament, their wings,
 Extending wing to wing, were upward spread.
 With two they bore themselves aloft, with two
 They veiled their bodies round ; and, as they went,
 I heard the rushing sound of wings, like rush
 Of mighty waters, or the distant sound
 Of thunder, the dread voice of Shaddai :
 They went with sound of tumult, like an host,
 And when they stopped they closed again their wings ;
 For when, from the o'er-arching firmament
 Above, a voice was uttered forth, they stood
 With wings depending, and close veiled around.
 And high upraised above the firmament

There seemed the sapphire splendour of a throne,
 And on the throne there sat, what seemed the form
 Of man. It shone with amber glow, of gold
 And silver intermixed, as burning fire.
 Both inward and without, and from the loins,
 Above and underneath, it seemed like fire,
 And shone with radiant lustre all around.
 As shines the rainbow in the day of rain,
 So seemed the lustre of that radiant form.
 The aspect of JEHOVAH's majesty
 I saw in this, and fell upon my face,
 And heard the voice of one that spake.

This author traces the poetical structure in several parts of the Pentateuch, which, as in the following example, rise out of the sober dignity of prose. "Let us consider," he says,* "the history of Abel. It stands like a mournful flower marked with blood, and in its simplicity just as poetical as it should be, for a proof of the punitive justice and the providence of God.

Where is Abel thy brother?
 What deed hast thou done?
 The voice of thy brother's blood
 Cries to me from the earth.

And now cursed art thou, an exile on the earth,
 Which hath opened her mouth,
 The stream of thy brother's blood
 To drink from thy hand.

When thou shalt till the ground,
 It shall not yield thee its strength;
 A fugitive and vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

"Observe how naturally and how forcibly every thing is set forth here—the blood crying for vengeance (and for a long time the living soul was supposed to be in the blood;) the ground pro-

* Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, vol. i. verse 103.

claiming the deed ; the maternal earth, which received the blood of her son from the hand of his brother, drank it, as it were, with horror, and afterwards refused to the murderer the free enjoyment of her fruitful energies. Observe with what strict justice God inflicts punishment, for the curse which he pronounces only unfolds the consequences of sin. The murderer could no longer remain in the house of his father, for there he would be the occasion of misery to himself and to all. He could not stay in the region where the crime was committed, for the blood raised its voice, the echoing earth cried out, and he himself said, 'every one that finds me will slay me ; I must be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth.' The merciful judge, therefore, did what the perplexed criminal knew not how to do. He removed him from his family, and from the circumstances which awakened his recollection and horror of the deed. He gave him another, perhaps unfruitful and mountainous, but to him secure region, and even became himself surety for the preservation of his life. Thus the blood of his brother was atoned for without a bloody revenge. The living is spared and preserved. Is not this, then, a model of paternal justice, and is not the whole history, in its several traits, fitted to alarm, to warn, to soothe, and to benefit ?”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The character of Josephus as a writer. Held in great estimation by Titus. Proud of the talents of his countrymen. His opinion of the metrical structure of Hebrew poetry. The opinions of Origin, Jerome, and Eusebius, concurrent with those of Josephus. Jerome discovers in the poetical scriptures of the Bible various forms of verse common to the Greek poets. Corresponding testimony of different authors.

ALTHOUGH I have, in the early part of the present volume, said so much of Hebrew poetry generally, I trust a few further observations will not be deemed out of place here upon this interesting and important subject. It was the opinion of Josephus, a learned Jew, of high character among his countrymen for profound erudition and critical sagacity, that the thanksgiving ode of Moses and other fragments of poetry in the Pentateuch, were composed in Hebrew verse. Josephus, being a person of acknowledged learning, well read in Grecian literature, and displaying considerable eloquence as a writer, which he sufficiently showed in his account of the Jewish wars, written by him in Syriac, and afterward translated by himself into Greek, was every way qualified to detect any similarity that

might exist betwixt the literary productions of Greece and those of a remoter age, especially of his own countrymen. His style was so animated, and his eloquence so persuasive, that he has been called the Livy of the Greeks. So high an opinion had the Emperor Titus of the merits of his "Jewish wars," that he gave this work the especial sanction of his name. He added his signature to it, and having bestowed upon it this royal mark of authenticity, ordered it to be placed in one of the public libraries. The authority of such a man as Josephus assuredly claims to be of some weight in every thing connected with Hebrew literature; and though his conjectures will not settle any disputed question upon this subject, it must necessarily add to the preponderance of presumptive testimony in favour of that side of the question in which his talents are arrayed, and he decidedly favours the assumption that the Hebrew poetry was metrical. He seems to have considered the subject carefully, and upon his views the learned fathers Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome, evidently grounded theirs.

Josephus, naturally proud of the talents displayed by the inspired authors of the sacred volume, fancied that he could discover in the poetry of the ancient writers among his own nation, those very elements which had rendered the Greeks so eminent throughout the world; thus transferring to the Hebrews the primary claim of being the fountain from which the most illustrious people of their age, until the decline of their political, in which to a certain extent was involved their intellectual domination, drew

their poetical stores. Seeing, as he did, in the productions of the early patriarchs, so long antecedent to the existence of the Grecian commonwealth, a vein of poetry greatly surpassing any found in the noblest productions of Greece, then pre-eminent among the nations of the earth for its intellectual superiority, he was captivated with the idea of tracing the origin of that superiority to the higher intellectual endowments of his own countrymen, in periods thrown so far back into primitive antiquity that the world, just rising into life and strength from the universal devastation of the deluge, had yet exhibited little or no harmony of legislative organization—when there was, in fact, no government but what existed in families disassociated in all their social and civil relations from the mass of the community around them; the most civilized races of the world being then mere tribes of nomadic shepherds.

It was this national vanity which most probably caused Josephus to trace, in the poetical compositions of Moses more especially, though likewise in those of the immediate progenitor of the Jewish race, that metrical form which had rendered Homer so renowned among the poets of his own, as well as among those of a subsequent period, and has, down to the present time, secured for him a reputation which can never die. Not content with discovering in the poetry of the Holy Scriptures, which he solemnly believed to contain the oracles of a divine revelation, the seeds of that excellence which had so elevated the Grecian name, the

learned Jew further discovered, or rather imagined, that the psalms, odes, and spiritual songs of David, were written in trimeters and pentameters, verses of three and five feet. This, however, is mere assumption without proof, as no data remain upon which the exact character of the Hebrew versification can be determined; neither does Josephus pretend to develop the deep and hitherto inscrutable secret of Hebrew prosody; nevertheless, his opinion would show at what a remote period the fact of the existence of Hebrew metre was maintained by those who might fairly claim to have a competent knowledge upon this difficult and still unsettled controversy.

Origen, a profound Hebrew scholar, though a somewhat wild theorist, and Eusebius, one of the most learned men of his time, both adopted the opinions of Josephus, who was wont to be considered, by the primitive fathers, as an authority all but infallible, though without throwing the least light upon this perplexed subject. From the manner in which those fathers speak of Hebrew poetry, it is manifest, not only that its beauties were fully appreciated in their time, but likewise that they considered it subjected to certain laws of versification, and this opinion has been clearly entertained from the apostolic period to the present.

Jerome, a man of laborious research, but of sufficient arrogance, more than at all times quite became the pious prefix of Saint to his name, often, too, fantastical in his deductions and rash in his conclusions, suggested plausible sup-

plements to the theories of those who had preceded him in similar investigations, and affirmed broadly, with that categorical dogmatism for which the schoolmen were so notorious, that the Psalter was composed in Alcaic, Iambic, and Sapphic verses, like the odes of Pindar and Horace. He states that the poetical portions of Deuteronomy, of Isaiah, the book of Job, the Canticles, consist exclusively of hexameter and pentameter verse, excepting only the canticle in Deuteronomy, which he assumes to consist of Iambic verses of four feet. In these decisions he has been supported by some modern critics of distinction, who have, however, utterly failed to establish his theories. Francis Gomarus, in his "*Lyra Davidis*," Meibomius and Van der Hardt, as I have before stated,* embraced similar views, though each assuming to adopt a theory of his own; but they have left the difficulty precisely where it was, though it may be observed that their having failed to settle the precise quality and form of Hebrew metre, can never be held as a proof that Hebrew metre did not exist.

Jerome observes, that "in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, there is exhibited a kind of Sapphic verse and verses of three measures. In several places, *Epist. ad Paulin, et lib. 9, Comment. in Ezek. chap. 30*, he speaks of the book of Psalms as a work composed of lyric verses, like those of Pindar, Alcæus, Horace, Catullus, and Serenus. In his preface to the book of Job, he says, that from these words—'Perish the day in which I

* Chap. iv.

was born,' are hexameter verses, composed of dactyls and spondees, wherein are sometimes intermixed other feet of the same measure, though they have not the same number of syllables, because of the variation of the language. Sometimes, he says, without any regard to the quantity of syllables, the poet impresses on you a kind of cadence or harmony which sensibly affects those who are skilful in the rules of poetry.

" Philo, de Vita Contemplativa, ad finem, says, that the Essenes have ancient poems, comprising verses of several forms and measures; some have three members, others are hymns sung at the sacrifices, others were rehearsed at meals, and others were accompanied with dances. Theodore Herbert thought he had found verses in the Bible like those of the Greeks and Latins; and he has really instanced some. Meibomius boasted, that for above two hundred years, nobody but himself had arrived at the knowledge of Hebrew poetry; but he kept this knowledge to himself, and did not think proper to communicate it to the world. We only know, that by means of his *poetry*, and the alterations he makes in the text, he takes the whole Scripture to pieces. Francis Gomarus, in his treatise entitled 'Davadis Lyrai,' has pretended to give the rules of Hebrew poetry, like those of Greek and Latin; but he brought upon himself a refutation from Lud. Capellus, which has not been answered.

" Le Clerc composed a very ingenious dissertation, to show that the Hebrew poetry was in

rhyme, pretty much like the French or English; and his opinion has been espoused by a good number of partisans. Others maintain that in the old Hebrew verses there is neither measure nor feet. Scaliger, *Animad. in Chronic. Euseb.*, p. 7, col. 1, even affirms that this language, as well as that of the Syrians, Arabians, and Abyssinians, is not capable of the restraint of feet or measures. Austin of Eugubium says, the Hebrews have neither heroic verses, nor Iambics, nor any other measure, but only something similar. This opinion is supported by Lud. Capellus, Martin Martinus, Samuel Bohlius, Wasmurh, Augustus Pfeiffer, and others. Grotius also declares for this; and this is indeed the sentiment which we think the most probable."* Whatever may be the opinions concerning the structure of Hebrew verse, generally, it will be evident, from those learned authorities already named, that poetry, subjected to the authorized rules and restrictions of art, and by consequence directly opposed to prose in the order of its composition, exists in the Bible, in those parts commonly admitted to be poetical; and of this fact I can scarcely conceive that any one, who has either a well-tuned ear, or a discriminative taste, can entertain a moment's doubt, or need the voucher of any learned authority. To me the thing appears all but self-evident.

* See Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, art. Poetry.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The history of Balaam. His character. Sent for by Balak to curse the Israelites. The form of malediction pronounced by the ancient heathens preserved by Macrobius. Balaam yields to the importunities of the Moabites, and accompanies them to Balak's capital. The several events of the journey detailed. Balaam's acquaintance with the worship of God. Shown that he was a true prophet. Reflections on his mission.

BEFORE I proceed to consider in detail the prophecies of Balaam, which follow next in order among the poetical portions of the Pentateuch, it will not be out of place to say a few words upon the history and character of this remarkable man, who, whatever might have been the wickedness of his latter years, was no doubt in his younger, a worshipper, and unquestionably a prophet of the true God. His character was a singular compound of reverence towards the Deity, and rebellion against him, the one being the effect of fear, the other of a natural and dominant proneness to evil. The good which appears in Balaam's character was presumptive merely ; it could not be ascertained but by the searcher of hearts ; the evil was positive and open to the detection of the most superficial scrutiny. His heart was evidently wedded to the world ; his apprehensions caused him to pay a reluctant and therefore a forced obedience to

the commands of that power which he knew was omnipotent, and which he consequently held in dread. His was no spontaneous obedience, no gratuitous reverence, but a slavish affiance, a devotion of which the exciting motives were terror and personal security ; though the temptations of avarice at length led him to overleap all bounds of restraint, and to reap the terrible harvest of unrighteousness on the field of slaughter.

In their progress towards the land of promise, having vanquished Sihon, king of the Amorites, a warlike potentate, who had denied them a passage through his territories, and Og, the king of Bashan, a man of gigantic stature, whose bed measured fifteen feet four inches in length, of prodigious prowess, and the terror of all the neighbouring states, the Israelites reached the plains bounded by the river Jordan, near the eastern bank of which they encamped, opposite to Jericho, at that time a flourishing and populous city. Balak, king of the Moabites, a weak and superstitious prince, a worshipper of the obscene Chemosh, and consequently a despiser of the living God, terrified at their success over the petty sovereigns whom they had subdued in their protracted journey through the wilderness, and apprehensive for the safety of his own dominions, according to the practice of those and subsequent times, dispatched messengers to Balaam, a celebrated diviner, seer, or sorcerer of Mesopotamia, to invite his presence for the purpose of pronouncing a malediction upon the enemy who had approached his borders, flushed with conquest, and thus of preventing an unfavourable

issue to the Moabites of the threatened hostilities, by setting in array the host of heaven against these bold and menacing aggressors. Balak was terrified at the near prospect of yielding up his sovereignty, and perhaps his life, to a strange enemy, who seemed endued with a power which no mere human appliances could control, and therefore vainly persuaded himself that the sorceries of the renowned magician of Mesopotamia might be purchased to consign to utter extermination those hosts, now under the immediate protection and guidance of the Infinite and Almighty Jehovah.

A notion prevailed at this time and long subsequently, as may be sufficiently ascertained from heathen writers, especially Macrobius, that certain persons who practised the arts of sorcery, or of divination, possessed the power of visiting countries with various plagues, such as famine, pestilence, or the sword, letting loose upon them the withering blast of desolation, and on this account their aid was frequently solicited in cases of threatened peril from invading foes; their imprecations being considered a more complete and certain engine of extermination than the implements of war; magicians were consequently held in great veneration, and were frequently considered to possess powers of destruction or of blessing equal to the gods, of whom they were supposed to be the accredited agents. The maledictions of such men were thought sufficient to paralyze the strength of armies, and even to arrest the arm of omnipotence. They were presumed capable of winning

the tutelar deities, in whom the people to be anathematized were imagined especially to confide, to forsake the cause of their worshippers, and abandon them to certain discomfiture. It is no wonder, therefore, that they were held in such reverence, and their presence courted by princes and sovereigns.

Macrobius, a Latin writer of the fifth century, in his *Saturnalia*, lib. iii. chap. 9, has preserved the form of imprecation used upon such occasions. The following is an imprecatory obtestation to devote to immediate destruction the city of Carthage, which, it was imagined, had been abandoned by the tutelary deities. “ Dis. Pater. Vejovis. Manes. or by whatever name you wish to be invoked, I pray you to fill this city of Carthage with fear and terror, and to put that army to flight which I mention, and which bears arms or darts against our legions and armies : and that ye may take away this army, those enemies, those men, their cities and their country, together with all who dwell in those places, regions, countries, or cities, and deprive them of the light above. Moreover, let all their armies, cities, country, chiefs, and people, be held by you consecrated and devoted according to those laws by which, and at what time, enemies can be most effectually devoted. I likewise give and devote them as vicarious sacrifices for myself and my magistracy ; for the Roman people and for all our armies and legions ; and for the whole empire, and that all the armies and legions which are employed in these countries, may be preserved in safety. If therefore ye will do these things, as I know, con-

ceive, and intend, then he who makes this vow, wheresoever and whensoever he shall make it, I engage shall sacrifice three black sheep to thee, O mother earth, and to thee, O Jupiter!"

"When the execrator mentions the earth, he stoops down and places both his hands upon it; and when he names Jupiter, he elevates both his hands towards heaven; and when he refers to his vow, he places his hands upon his breast."

Balak, under the apprehension of immediate invasion by the armies of Israel, having deputed certain persons to wait upon the prophet of Pethor in Mesopotamia, commanded them to solicit his professional aid against the general enemies of Canaan, whom he was desirous should be subjected to the terrible ban of so potential a magician, for such Balaam was manifestly considered by the superstitious and cowardly sovereign of Moab. These functionaries took with them presents no doubt of considerable value, in order to induce a person of Balaam's high repute in those mysterious arts of which he assumed to be master, to perform the bidding of their king. Balaam, however, not daring to act contrary to the divine will, which he solemnly consulted upon this occasion, and which peremptorily forbade his cursing the Israelites; apprehending, moreover, the fearful issue of a pertinacious opposition to that will, he at once declined accompanying the envoys of Balak, who immediately returned to their master with an account of their unsuccessful embassy. This was a severe disappointment to the pusillanimous Moabite; nevertheless, supposing that the

man on whom he relied as being both willing and able to exterminate his foes was still to be tempted into compliance with the royal request;—assuming that his ambition had not been sufficiently flattered, or his covetousness sufficiently bribed, the wily monarch forthwith sent a deputation of princes and nobles, with more valuable presents and more flattering promises of promotion to high civil dignities, provided the seer of Mesopotamia would accompany them, and consent to perform the behest of their royal master. Balak, it is evident, well knew the disposition of the man with whom he had commissioned his agents to negotiate; he therefore tempted him with treasures, to which the prophet's heart bowed as to a divinity. Balaam's besetting passion, which appears to have been avarice, though ambition almost divided with it the empire of his soul, was now roused. His eager desire of wealth and of exaltation to honours in the then flourishing kingdom of Balak, rendered him a willing listener to those tempting proposals, which at once flattered his vanity and pampered his appetite of gain. The carnal impulse was too strong for spiritual resistance, and he yielded with a ready acquiescence to that temptation which at once appealed to his too prevailing passions, avarice and ambition. So strong was the solicitation of these animal influences that, in spite of his dread of the divine supremacy, which he not only acknowledged, but of which he had received the most signal proofs, he madly resolved to listen to the suggestion of his own selfish desires, and yield to mammon that devo

tion which he knew to belong alone of right to God. Still he maintained the demeanour of a devout man. He did not act with open and daring defiance, but with plausible subtlety invoked the Deity, whom he had no doubt, from the first, made up his mind to dishonour. Though he seemed to walk in light, he was really groping in darkness, giving a fearful illustration of those beautiful lines of our great epic poet:—

He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day:
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts,
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;
Himself is his own dungeon. COMUS.

Balaam, “loving the wages of unrighteousness,” anxiously importuned the Lord Jehovah to be allowed to accompany the heathen mission, notwithstanding that his appeal had, in a former instance, been rejected, and he must consequently have been well aware that his request was no less presumptuous than offensive to the Deity, whom he fully acknowledged, and of whose vengeance he confessedly stood in awful apprehension, though he did not truly serve him. He was indeed permitted to go with the emissaries of Moab, who had so successfully pleaded their master’s cause to an unreluctant ear, but forbidden to do that for which his presence was desired. God yielded to the avaricious prophet’s request, not as a dispensation of omnipotent love, but, knowing the motive which actuated it, he granted it, in order to punish the selfish hypocrite for listening to the suggestions of his sordid passions, since, in the issue, as is too commonly the case with bad men, for not hearkening to the voice of

God he was left to perish in his own devices. The permission, then, to accompany the messengers of Balak, was not a boon, but a punishment, as the consequences of that permission proved fatal to him to whom it was granted. How often is this the case with mere selfish worshippers, whose prayers to Heaven are chiefly offered up for personal benefits, and who, under the impression that they are beseeching a blessing, are often actually soliciting a penalty.

In Balaam's journey to the Moabitish capital, an angel, dispatched from above on a mission of mercy to warn the rash delinquent of the peril impending over him, stood in the path, perceived by the ass which Balaam rode, though invisible to the unholy prophet, who, blinded by the wicked purposes which then most probably engrossed his thoughts, was not permitted for the moment to behold the divine delegate.

Virtue could see to do what virtue would
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the flat sea sunk ;

CONUS.

but vice had so obscured the spiritual perceptions of this unholy man, that he was neither able now to discern the glory of the celestial herald, nor the beauty of that goodness of which it has been most emphatically and truly said that it is "its own reward." His wickedness was here eminently signalized. The ass, perceiving the angel, turned out of the road into a field to avoid passing him, upon which Balaam smote her with a staff, and with some difficulty forced her again into the path. The passage was

now extremely narrow, there being a wall on either side enclosing a vineyard. The ass, again perceiving the angel standing in the middle of the way, pressed so near the wall, in order to avoid the heavenly messenger, as to crush the foot of her unrighteous master. Smarting with pain, the enraged seer immediately smote her with greater severity than before, probably adding curses to his inhumanity. A little further in advance, the road had become so exceedingly reduced in width that there was not room for two persons to travel abreast without considerable inconvenience. Here the poor ill-used beast, again seeing the angel, robed in the brightness of that glory from which he had descended, armed with a drawn sword and standing in the very centre of the passage, was so overcome with terror that she fell down under her unfeeling rider, who, excited to the highest degree of exasperation, not only beat her with criminal fury, but declared that if he were armed he would immediately put her to death.

In this passage the character of Balaam is incidentally, as it were, exhibited. It will be seen that to his two dominant passions, ambition and avarice, he added the vices of heartlessness and cruelty. His threatening to kill the ass, and implying regret that he had not the means of doing so, show that this heartless man was now so steeped in the selfishness of his anticipations from the promised patronage and reward of the king of Moab, that he had no sympathy for the suffering of a dumb creature which had served him, as he afterwards confessed,

for a long period to his entire satisfaction. No sooner had he smitten his faithful beast the third time accompanying his cruel blow with a still more cruel threat, than the Almighty performed an extraordinary miracle by opening the animal's mouth, "the dumb ass," as St. Peter affirms, "speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet." And here it may be observed that the apostle at once attests the truth of this miracle: confirming the fact that the ass actually did speak, and that her master was really endowed with the gift of prophecy. His words will admit of no other interpretation. St. Peter, writing as he did under the influence of inspiration, would not have alluded to this marvellous circumstance in terms so clear and explicit had there been any doubt of the literal occurrence as recorded in this place. He represents the ass as employing for the moment a faculty exclusively belonging to man, for it was with man's voice that the animal expostulated with her master on his ill treatment of her.

No sooner had the dumb beast miraculously received the temporary gift of speech, than she reproached the intemperate seer with his extreme cruelty towards her, and had scarcely finished her expostulation, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Balaam, rebuked him for his criminal rage, and, reminding him that he was not permitted to deliver the divine oracle otherwise than it should be revealed unto him, allowed him to proceed on his journey. This warning of the celestial missionary restrained the prophet's anger and brought him for the time to a proper sense of his condition. He bowed with apparent

submission to the solemn interdiction, and heard with reverence the angelic warning. He passed on his way rejoicing at his escape, but at the same moment maturing his schemes of future aggrandizement, and already calculating the wages of unrighteousness.

The whole of this history shows that the conduct of Balaam was extremely displeasing to the Almighty, who permitted, but did not sanction, his journey. Permission does not necessarily suppose approbation, if it did, the infallible God might be taxed with an approval of sin, for it cannot be denied that he permits it to be committed, though he must of necessity detest it. How often, however, does its severest punishment in this world accrue from that very permissions? it therefore becomes the all-wise means of an all-wise end.

This history again proves that the seer of Mesopotamia was acquainted with the true God, as was the case with many gentiles, among whom I need only mention Job, his family and those who reproved him in his sufferings. What system of religion was embraced by the prophet of Pethor is not so readily determined, still is it to be presumed that he sanctioned the rites of paganism, from the circumstance of his sacrifice of the seven bullocks and seven rams after his arrival at Balak's capital.

This narrative further confirms the fact, disputed indeed by some learned divines, that Balaam, though probably a practiser of magical arts was nevertheless not only acquainted with the true God, but likewise endowed by him with

the gift of prophecy, since the predictions to which he gave utterance at the command of Balak are at this moment received both by Jews and Christians as among the most important and remarkable of the sacred volume, especially when it is considered by whom they were delivered. How he obtained a knowledge of the religion which prevailed among those whom God had chosen from among the numerous communities of the world to be his peculiar people, may be readily presumed. Abraham, who had resided at Haran in Mesopotamia, where his father Terah died, no doubt left impressions of the patriarchal worship, and with this, it may be naturally enough supposed, the prophet of Pethor was consequently acquainted. It is further to be presumed that he was originally a good man, when the gift of prophecy was first bestowed ; for I conclude that he had exercised this gift long before he was applied to by the royal Moabite, but finding that such distinction procured him a profitable reputation, he probably relinquished a pure for a more carnal worship, and like other deluded men, such as Simon Magus in a subsequent age, resorted to the juggles of sorcery, because these produced more largely the means of gratifying his insatiable and criminal avarice ; receiving the wages of unrighteousness, not only from the king of Moab, but most likely upon all occasions, when he practised the arts of an unholy profession at the solicitation of others.

“In him,” says Mr. Robinson,* “we perceive

* See *Scripture Characters*, vol. i, p. 338.

a man possessed, in some measure at least, of right notions of religion, who, under an awful impression of the fear of God, discovered many convictions and desires of the best kind, and who was favoured not only with eminent abilities, but with visions and revelations of the Lord ;” who yet, through the influence of the accursed passion of covetousness, resisted the clearest dictates of his conscience, and the express commands from on high, pursued the purpose of iniquity with cool deliberation, endeavoured by base artifices to obtain a license to sin, and perished at last among the enemies of God. His wickedness on the present occasion was of the basest kind, because he accompanied the heathen delegates with a determination to curse the Israelites, if permitted, although he knew such a base intention was directly opposed to the divine will ; and was only withheld from putting his criminal purpose into practice, as is evidently signified in the sacred text, by the angel who stood in his way between the walls of the vineyards. That his purpose was evil, is manifest from the whole tone of the narrative, but that he was a true prophet in spite of his wickedness, is likewise manifest, from the circumstance that what he predicted in those sublime poems which the Jewish lawgiver has preserved, most signally came to pass. Nor will it appear more strange that Balaam should have been a true prophet of God than that Judas Iscariot should have been a true disciple of Christ. The latter worked miracles, healed the sick, restored the maimed, the halt, the blind, and preached

the gospel to the poor, yet he betrayed his master, and will be among the outcasts from heaven. The prophet of Pethor, though any thing but a man after "God's own heart," was nevertheless commissioned to deliver his oracles, not as a privilege, but as a punishment, for this power of declaring the divine revelations against his own will was to him a source of mortification, confusion, and disappointment. He would rather have been the messenger of evil tidings than of good. His desire was to be the bearer of curses, not of blessings; and by being made, upon this occasion, the prophet of the Most High, he forfeited the promised rewards of divination, and provoked the hostility of that wicked prince by whom he expected to be raised to honour.

Perhaps a severer punishment could not have been inflicted upon this unholy man, than causing him to defeat his own expectations of gain, by making him the oracle of truth, when his becoming so only rendered him the more "exceeding sinful." The glad tidings which he delivered recoiled in disastrous consequences upon his own head, because his heart was set against them;—he loved the wages of unrighteousness better than the sweet consolations of virtue.

Although Balaam assured the sovereign of Moab that he could only act as he should be permitted by the Almighty, it is nevertheless clear that he desired to curse, not to bless, the Israelites, hoping to obtain the rewards promised to his successful endeavours, or, as the sacred

historian characterized them, the rewards of divination. This he unblushingly showed by his behaviour after he found himself unable to deliver a false oracle, when, in order to bring down upon the Israelites the effects of the malediction which he did not dare pronounce, he counselled that they should be seduced by the blandishments of the Midianitish women, who were as licentious as they were beautiful, to join in those abominable idolatries of the heathens so solemnly interdicted by Moses under the influence of inspiration. This wily but malicious policy, acting as it did so fatally upon many of the unwary Hebrews, shows the astute and calculating wickedness of this great bad man, who was nevertheless an instrument in the hand of God to his own confusion and punishment.

It is worthy of remark how "the terrors of the Lord" operated in the breast of one altogether devoid of the highest principles of good, to prevent him, in direct contradiction to his own personal interest, from acting in opposition to those determinations communicated by the celestial envoy. Balaam had the will, but not the power, to curse the favoured enemies of Moab. He dared not act contrary to the interdiction of Him whom he knew to be omnipotent, and ready to avenge his violated laws. This compulsory obedience, however, did not procure for the unrighteous prophet the favour of that God whose anger he dreaded, but whose love he had failed to obtain. This will at once show, that if we act in obedience to the divine commands merely from the influence of terror, not from the impulses of

love, we shall certainly not be ranked among those heirs of salvation for whom Christ, through the merits of his expiatory sacrifice, has procured an inheritance "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Where the heart is really awakened to affection for the Deity, terror can have no place within its sanctuary; for, as the apostle truly and beautifully declares, "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment: he that feareth is not made perfect in love."*

In the history before us, it will be observed that the prophet is reproved by an ass—that a person endowed with supernatural illumination is not only rebuked, but likewise instructed, in the obligations of moral justice, by one of the least intelligent of the brute creation; thus showing that the wisest men may occasionally receive instruction from the most insignificant objects—an admirable lesson to curb the vanity of that mere wisdom of this world which is "foolishness with God." This, however, is a lesson within the daily scope of our experience, if we will only pause to peruse it, for how frequently do we find that the rustic, whose whole life is passed in turning up the clods of the valley, can instruct the philosopher. The meanest amongst the sons of men almost invariably possess some knowledge of which the wisest are ignorant. The field of wisdom is so extensive that it cannot be occupied by one individual mind; it is divided out into portions, of which

* 1 John, iv. 18.

the greatest minds naturally claim and enjoy the largest.

The writer of Additions to Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by Taylor, has some ingenious suggestions, which I consider worth quoting here. Upon Balaam's ass, he observes: "I think we may assume as facts, first, that Balaam was accustomed to augury and presages; secondly, that on this occasion he would notice every event capable of such interpretation, as presages were supposed to indicate; thirdly, that he was deeply intent upon the issue of his journey; fourthly, that the whole of his conduct towards Balak was calculated to represent himself as an extraordinary personage; fifthly, that the behaviour of the ass did actually prefigure the conduct of Balaam in the three particulars of it which are recorded. First, the ass turned aside and went into the field, for which she was smitten, *punished, reprov'd*: so Balaam, on the first of his perverse attempts to curse Israel, was, as it were, smitten, reprov'd, punished; first, by God; secondly, by Balak. The second time, the ass was more harshly treated, for hurting Balaam's foot against the wall; so Balaam, for his second attempt, was no doubt still further mortified; thirdly, the ass seeing inevitable danger, fell down, and was smitten severely; in like manner Balaam, the third time, was overruled by God, to speak truth to his own disgrace; and escaped, not without hazard of his life, from the anger of Balak. Nevertheless, as Balaam had no sword in his hand, though he wished for one with which to slay his ass, so

Balak, notwithstanding his fury and his seeming inclination, had no power to destroy Balaam. In short, as the ass was *opposed* by the angel, but was *driven forward* by Balaam, so Balaam was *opposed* by God, but was *driven forward* by Balak, against his better knowledge. Were we sure that Balaam wrote this story, and that Moses copied his narrative, as the Rabbins affirm,* this view of the subject would remove the difficulties which have been raised about it. It might then be entitled 'a specimen of Balaam's augury.'"

The day after Balaam's arrival at Balak's capital, he was conducted by the anxious king to the high places consecrated to Baal, whence he was able to behold the entire camp of the Israelites pitched in the plain below on the further bank of the river Jordan. They presented a numerous and magnificent array. Their tents spreading in the valleys beneath, their arms glittering in the sun, and the skilful distribution of their camp, showed that they were an enemy justly to be dreaded. Upon the lofty eminence on which the seer of Mesopotamia was then standing, he ordered seven altars to be erected, and a bullock and a ram to be offered in sacrifice upon every altar, in accordance with the superstitious worship of the Moabites. It is clear that this was not a sacrifice offered to the Lord Jehovah, but to the objects of heathen adoration, as Balaam retires from the altars to receive the divine communications, not daring to invoke the

* And which I implicitly believe.

Deity beside the abominations of Moab. It is merely said that the sacrifices were offered, but not to whom, as if Balaam had little desire to record an act of heathen superstition of which he was probably himself ashamed, though it was very likely to increase the confidence of a weak and bigoted prince. It is from hence, therefore, to be inferred, that the erection of those seven altars upon which the septenary sacrifices were slain, was nothing more than a mere external appendage to the enchantments which were looked for at the prophet's hands, in order to give an apparent sanction and impart solemnity to the whole scene in the eyes of Balak, who evidently took Balaam to be a potent magician; and it is more than probable that in order to confirm the impression which produced him so much gain, being no doubt well paid for such exercises of his profession, Balaam employed those external signs of his craft; thus audaciously blending the jugglery of heathen priestcraft with the service of the true God. I take the erection of the seven altars to have no other signification than this. Mummery is one of the essential aids upon which sorcery has depended for its success in every age of the world, where it has obtained the sanction of the weak and superstitious. Balaam evidently knew that the sacrifices offered upon the seven altars could have no effect in diverting the Deity from his purpose of blessing the Israelites, but he was at least willing to show the king of Moab, that he had employed every effort and means in his

power to produce the issue desired by his royal employer. It would seem that, in this particular instance, the prophet of Pethor was endowed with the gift of prophecy against his own will, as he gave utterance to oracles the very reverse of those he desired to proclaim, thus bringing upon himself the anger of Balak, by pronouncing a blessing upon those whom that monarch hated, and had commanded him to execrate. How often do we find within ourselves an oracle delivered by our consciences, that we would fain suppress, but which, in spite of our adverse wills, addresses to the reluctant soul annunciations of which it would willingly avoid the communication; but no, it is obliged to hear and tremble.

It is supposed by Psalmanazar, a questionable authority, it is true, but his arguments are proposed with great ingenuity, and embraced by some learned men, that the seven altars erected on the high places of Baal were dedicated to the seven planets to which, together with the sun, the worshippers of Baal offered daily adoration. Upon these altars burnt-offerings were sacrificed by Balaam and Balak, kings in those days uniting the characters of sovereign and priest, as was the case with Melchisedeck.

In Roberts' "Oriental Illustrations of Scripture,"* I find the following facts stated, which are singularly coincident with the history before us. Alluding to certain Hindoo customs,

Mr. Roberts says: "Before a king goes to battle, he makes a sacrifice to the goddess of the royal family, whose name is Veerma Kali, in order to ascertain what will be the result of the approaching conflict, and likewise to enable him to curse his enemies.

"In front of the temple are raised seven altars, near to which are seven vessels filled with water, upon each of which are mango leaves and a cocoa nut with its tuft on. Near to each altar is a hole containing fire. The victims, which may be seven, or fourteen, or twenty-one, consisting of buffalos, or rams, or cocks, are brought forward. A strong man strikes off the head of the victim at one blow, and the carcase is thrown into the hole of fire with prayers and incantations. The priest then goes into the temple and offers incense, and after some time, returns in a frantic manner, declaring what will be the result of the battle. Should the answer received be favourable, he takes a portion of ashes from each hole, and throwing them in the direction of the enemy, pronounces upon them the most terrible imprecations.

"The number *seven* also is generally attended to by the poor in their offerings, or, if they cannot do that, they have always an odd number. Thus seven areka nuts, or the same number of limes, plantains, or of beetle leaves, or seven measures of rice will be presented." It is a notorious fact, that the prevailing customs of Hindostan are just the same at this moment as they were in times of the most primitive

antiquity, and hence it is to be inferred that the same or very similar rites prevailed in India in the days of Balak, as were observed by the different nations of Canaan, before the Israelites expelled them from their land, and introduced a less obnoxious form of worship.

CHAPTER XXX.

Balaam's first prophecy.

AFTER the sacrifices had been slain upon the high places of Baal, in accordance with the command of Balaam, the prophet having retired from the immediate place of sacrifice to a more secluded part of the mountain,* received the important revelation. It is said that "God met Balaam," as he was no doubt formerly wont to do, before the prophet had lapsed into heresy and listened to the solicitations of avarice. Almost immediately after, God is said to have "put a word in Balaam's mouth," or in other words, to have made him the agent of divine communication. It is clear, therefore, from this passage, that the Deity revealed to Balaam his immutable will respecting those whom that sordid man was anxious to execrate; and when the disappointed seer returned to Balak, who still stood by the altars of sacrifice, he delivered the following prediction:

Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram,
Out of the mountains of the east, saying,
Come, curse me Jacob,
And come, defy Israel.

* See Numbers xxiii. 3.

How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed ?
 Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied ?
 From the top of the rocks I see him,
 And from the hills I behold him :
 Lo ! the people shall dwell alone,
 And shall not be reckoned among the nations.
 Who can count the dust of Jacob
 And the number of the fourth part of Israel ?
 Let me die the death of the righteous,
 And let my last end be like his !

It cannot fail to be observed how distinctly the parallels run through the whole of this prediction. Every second line is in direct parallelism with the one preceding it, being either a close exposition of it, or imparting to it a more obvious and extended signification. In the opening distich of the exordium, we find this beautifully exemplified, especially in Bishop Lowth's translation,* which is so admirable that I shall without scruple introduce it here. The poetical form is very faithfully preserved :—

From Aram I am brought by Balak,
 By the king of Moab from the mountains of the east.
 Come, curse me Jacob,
 And come, execrate Israel.
 How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed ?
 And how shall I execrate whom God hath not execrated.
 For from the top of the rocks I see him,
 And from the hills I behold him :
 Lo ! the people who shall dwell alone,
 Nor shall number themselves among the nations !
 Who shall count the dust of Jacob,
 Or the number of the fourth of Israel ?
 Let my soul die the death of the righteous,
 And let my end be as his.

Referring to the two first lines of the prophecy as here rendered, I would remark, that Aram was the country of Mesopotamia which lay to

* See Fourteenth Prælection.

the eastward of Moab, being towards Arabia rocky and mountainous. In the first verse of the opening couplet, we find the name of the country from which the prophet was brought simply stated, and likewise that of the Moabitish king. In the next there is an acknowledgment of Balak's dignity, and likewise the information conveyed of the peculiar locality of Balak's dwelling-place.

From Aram I am brought by Balak,
By the *king of Moab* from the *mountains of the east*.

Here is an elegant inversion of the parallels; *Aram* and the *mountains of the east*, respectively commencing and terminating the first and second verses of the couplet: *Balak* and the *king of Moab* in like manner ending and commencing the first and second lines. There is evident design in this artificial distribution of the emphatic portions of the sentence, which shows that certain acknowledged laws of composition were fulfilled in this noble production of a poet who wrote upwards of three thousand years ago. These two verses form an agreeable epanode, though they do not precisely answer to Bishop Jebb's rationale of that poetical artifice, the principal members of each verse being embraced within the distich, instead of commencing and ending it. A trifling alteration would obviate this, without really disturbing the poetical arrangement, or in the slightest degree interfering with the sense, as thus—

By *Balak* am I brought from Aram,
From the mountains of the east, by the *king of Moab*.

Here the epanode is perfect, and I think the distribution much more agreeable than in Bishop Lowth's rendering. The two most important terms, or those to which the greatest prominence belongs, respectively begin and end the couplet, a mode of arrangement, if not exclusively peculiar to Hebrew poetry, still a very marked feature of it, and often most admirably contrived to bring out the emphatic portions of a sentence to which importance is to be attached. It was necessary that Balaam should show by whose authority he quitted his home in the mountains of the east, for the purpose of cursing the Israelites, he therefore begins the distich with stating the name of his employer, and ends it by declaring his regality. This is very significant, moreover how finely does this primitive bard, in the exordium of his first prophecy, contrast the impotence of an earthly potentate with the omnipotence of the heavenly. He begins by stating that he has been called from the mountainous parts of Mesopotamia, by a powerful king, for the purpose of pronouncing a malediction upon the enemies of that king, but though commanded to curse the posterity of Abraham by a mighty sovereign, he is prevented by a mightier.

I cannot help noticing, by the way, the pious mistakes of some devout men, who, in considering the marvellous power of intellect exhibited in the sacred volume, will not satisfy themselves that it contains the word of God, unless they suppose every phrase to have been the issue of a direct revelation. Nothing can be more fallacious or more weak, for it was the object of

the Deity, in delivering his revelations, that they should be intelligible to those for whose benefit they were designed, and how could they be rendered so intelligible as in the language and forms of speech with which they were familiar, for whose immediate benefit these revelations were intended. It could not surely signify in what form of words they were proclaimed, the matter only was the object of divine communication, the language merely the vehicle in which it was conveyed. I am therefore the more surprised at the simplicity of Dr. Adam Clarke's note upon the words, "he took up his parable." "All these oracular speeches of Balaam," he observes, "are in hemistich metre in the original. They are highly dignified, and may be considered as immediate *poetic* productions of the spirit of God; for it is expressly said, verse 5, that God put the word into Balaam's mouth, and that the spirit of God came upon him (chap. xxiv. 2)."

I only wonder that the learned commentator did not go one step further, and attempt to show, following the ingenious surmises of St. Jerome, that the spirit of God himself composed those prophecies, delivered by Balaam, in hexameter or pentameter verse, and communicated them to him, so composed, for the admiration of all times. All this is such solemn trifling with the gravity befitting the investigation of scripture truth, that it rather gives a handle to infidelity than serves to weaken the assaults of scepticism. The moment an attempt is made to prove too much, you lead the scoffer at once to presume that you are really able to prove too little, and thus

strengthen him in his prejudices. The word of God needs no such weak assumptions to stamp upon it the character of divine.

I pass on now to the consideration of the prophecy. The whole proemial portion of this prediction is managed with marvellous felicity; it is full of masculine eloquence, and even independent of its sacred character, every way worthy of the highest admiration.

The second distich, as translated by Lowth, preserves the gradational parallelism more distinctly than our authorized version. It is brief, compact, and full of power. There is not the slightest embellishment, but every word carries with it a simple force that renders these two short hemistichs exceedingly striking. They exhibit a Doric simplicity and strength, which at once fills the mind with one vast idea, unbroken and undisturbed by no subsidiary or interposing additament, and yet, as I have said, the parallelism is beautifully preserved.

Come, curse me Jacob,
And come, execrate Israel.

We see in this passage how justly the gradation of force rises in the second hemistich, notwithstanding the close conformity of the parallels. *Execrate* is an evident advance upon *curse*, as it signifies a malediction pronounced with the utmost vehemence of rage; it combines passion with cursing. Balak was not content that the magician should exercise the ordinary resources of his art against the enemies of Canaan, but

desired that he would exhibit the deepest malignity of an evil agent, in whose supernatural power the royal Moabite implicitly believed. He therefore commanded him, not simply to utter a common denunciation of evil,'but to pronounce against them the deepest and most withering imprecation.

Israel likewise shows a distinct gradation of force upon *Jacob*, the latter being the kindred designation of the patriarch, who was the immediate progenitor of the Israelites; the former being the name from which they derived their title as a nation, and referred to an event in the life of this ancestor, which remarkably distinguished him as a man approved of God, and in an especial manner under divine protection. I allude to the memorable circumstance of his wrestling with an angel at Penue! This pair of hemistichs, beyond the beauties which signalize the composition, prominently display the inveterate hatred felt by the sovereign of Moab towards God's chosen people, as he was not contented that a simple anathema should be pronounced upon them, but demanded that the most ruthless execrations should be directed against foes whom he held in absolute terror, which would be followed, as he vainly imagined, by their utter extermination. The character of the royal Moabite is here displayed in all its recreant and heartless ferocity. It stands fully and repulsively developed. The distich may be thus paraphrased. 'Come, curse the posterity of Jacob, who have come from the wilderness beyond Jordan to invade my territories, and

pronounce an exterminating execration upon the descendants of him who is said to have wrestled with an angel, and thus to have been distinguished above his fellow men, by the divine sustentation. Pour out your fiercest maledictions upon those formidable invaders whom I so deeply detest, that I am desirous of sweeping them at once from the face of the earth.'

"The orientals in their wars," says Mr. Roberts,* "have always their magicians with them to curse their enemies and to mutter incantations for their overthrow. Sometimes they secretly convey a potent charm amongst the opposing troops, to cause their destruction.

"In our late war with the Burmese, the generals had several magicians, who were much engaged in cursing our troops; but as they did not succeed, a number of witches were brought for the same purpose."

This will sufficiently show how closely the primitive customs of the east are at this day observed among the idolaters of that populous, but still benighted region. It is astonishing how few are either the changes, whether social or civil, among the inhabitants, who have relinquished none of the customs of their ancestors; to these they still adhere with the most scrupulous pertinacity, and there is no doubt that many practices of the modern Hindoos were coeval with the age of Moses.

After Balaam had stated the desire of his royal patron, in summoning him from the moun-

* Oriental Illustrations, p. 102.

tains of the east to fulfil his execrable design upon the chosen seed of Abraham,—how beautiful is the prophet's reply !—

How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed,
And how shall I execrate whom God hath not execrated ?

In this passage there is a severe but covert reproach directed against Balak. Such reproach was probably unintentional on the part of Balaam, but it is not therefore the less severe ; on the contrary its force is more direct and strong. It proclaims the moral superiority of the Israelites over the Moabites, the one being under the immediate care of Omnipotence, the other abandoned to the impotent guardianship of factitious divinities, which “ were no gods,” but “ the work of men's hands.” It at the same time reflects upon the presumption of the gentile king in commanding his mercenary to curse those whom the Almighty had blessed. This and the preceding couplet thus place the Moabites and Israelites in striking moral contrast,—the one seeking the agency of demons, the other trusting in the living God. The strength of the reproach lies in the second line, where the idea of execrating is applied to the immaculate Jehovah, an act of which he must of necessity be absolutely incapable, as execration implies passion, and passion, in any sense of the term, or under any modification whatever, is altogether incompatible with divine perfection. God could not execrate even those who had the most grievously offended him ; the wickedness of Balak is consequently the more prominently brought to view, by his

desiring Balaam to attempt against the Israelites, what the Almighty could not do even to his worst foes, simply because he is incapable of acting wickedly, the only thing impossible to infinite perfection. Balaam indeed did not intend to convey a reproach against his unrighteous employer, but, as I have said and likewise endeavoured to show, that reproach became the more severe from the very circumstance of its being unpremeditated. It is admirable to observe how prominently the selfish and avaricious prophet exhibits the wickedness of his own sinister designs, while at the same time he attests the divine power and bears testimony to the moral superiority of Balak's enemies. He in fact reverses the object of his unholy mission, for he curses himself and his royal employer in blessing the foes of both. All this is manifestly beside his intention, but as the spirit of prophecy, which he had in fact solicited, was really upon him, he was unable either to suppress its inspirations or to withhold them when communicated, though they both operated against his own interests and defeated the evil purposes of the king.

Balaam's eager desire, but utter inability, to perform the behest of the Moabitish monarch is exquisitely shown in the concluding lines of the introduction. God had not cursed the posterity of Jacob, how then should a mere human agent, although divinely inspired, pronounce effectively an imprecation which the Deity himself had withheld! The prophet's words imply regret, as if he had said, 'I would willingly execrate the

strangers, but dare not ; they are under protection against which no mortal power can prevail.' This we are warranted in assuming from the ready alacrity with which he left his home for the purpose of realizing the wicked intentions of his employer. His subsequent conduct in advising the seduction of the Israelites by the daughters of Midian, fully proved that he entertained no desire of blessing them, but was the involuntary agent of proclaiming the divine purpose to his own disappointment, and to the fierce vexation of the Moabitish king.

How pregnant with meaning are the two lines just considered. They exhibit at one view the omnipotence of God, the impotency of man : the vain regret of Balaam, the heartless atrocity of Balak ; the greatness and goodness of the Creator, the wickedness and imbecility of the creature. The whole of this prophecy may be considered a most favourable specimen of Hebrew poetry, and may be studied by all readers of taste as combining the highest graces of the poetic art with the sacred truths of inspiration ; and for this reason I have been anxious to point out those graces to the reader's observation, as the minutest beauties observable in the sacred writings, whether spiritual, moral, or poetical, ought to be duly distinguished and appreciated by every real lover of that divine depository of revelation, the Bible. If we were merely examining some sublime, but uninspired production of a celebrated heathen poet, our interest would cease to be excited after we had obtained a thorough perception of its beauties, but here

the case is widely different, for those beauties are only subsidiary to the ultimate design of the revelation, they do not constitute its primary and essential features. Nevertheless I am persuaded that the exquisite poetry contained in these predictions might lead many persons, who had never yet sought to be acquainted with God through his own revealed oracles, to resort to them as containing the elements of the highest intellectual gratification, and I cannot conceive but that they who had once been brought to admire would soon be induced to worship. Hence it is I am unwilling that any of the beauties of those writings indisputably poetical in the Pentateuch, should be lost sight of, feeling satisfied as I do, that if they were more extensively perused they would be as extensively felt. I mention the poetical portions of the Pentateuch especially, because I think it probable that the sceptic who has a relish for true poetry, might be induced to look, where he has perhaps never searched for it, in the sacred volume, in which it is so abundantly found; and if so, might be led from the beauties present in the language of scripture to the divine truths which it contains, and be brought from admiration of the one to become a convert to the other.

I trust I have shown that so far as Balaam's first prophecy has been considered, it is distinguishable for its great eloquence and metrical symmetry, both of which qualities are very faithfully presented in Bishop Lowth's version. It must however be admitted that, in this version, "execrated" is an unmusical word, and its intro-

duction twice in one line renders the latter somewhat harsh. The euphony of the verse in which the word occurs twice, is unquestionably more perfect, though it must at the same time be admitted that the sense is proportionably less so, in our authorized translation, as will be instantly seen:

How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed,
Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied.

In this couplet, according to Lowth's reading, it is evident that what is lost in mere harmony is more than countervailed by the nice preservation of the parallelism, both gradational and constructive, for each form exists in this distich, and the increased force and pertinency of expression. I think moreover, that the repetition of the sacred name of God in the second clause, is far more solemn than the variation to LORD, as in the common reading; because in the latter the weaker word is employed in the concluding line, in which there is throughout an evident advance in the sense. Execrate is unquestionably a far more appropriate word than defy, not only as it gives a better sense and is in stricter conformity with the context, but likewise as it maintains unimpaired both the correspondency and delicate symmetry of the parallelism.

These, I am willing to admit, may be considered with some colour of justice, nice and over-refined points of criticism, but it should at the same time be remembered that they frequently fill up the vast interval in poetry between the sublime and the ridiculous. They are therefore by no means unworthy of attention. I am,

moreover, the more anxious to direct the reader's notice to a fact not generally considered, and much less generally understood, that the richest resources of the poetic art are existent in these eloquent and sublime predictions.

Upon the words curse and defy as our translators have rendered the latter expression, Bishop Patrick remarks, that they are "two different expressions for the same thing, only the latter word, which we translate defy, imports something of fury, because he would have had him curse them in such a prophetic rage, as would have the most direful effects upon them."* The Targum of Jerusalem paraphrases this couplet as follows:—"How shall I curse the house of Jacob, when the word of the Lord hath blessed them? Or how shall I diminish the family of Israel, when the word of the Lord hath multiplied them." Here is a good sense, though much below the condensed vigour of the *original* passage.

* See Bishop Patrick's note.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Balaam's first prophecy, continued.

HAVING closed the exordium of his first prophecy, the inspired bard proceeds to deliver the divine oracle, with reference to the future condition of those enemies of Moab, whom their sovereign had commanded him to execrate. This was anxiously expected by Balak, who was standing by the altars of sacrifice, impatiently waiting to hear the curse of immediate extermination pronounced upon God's people.

For from the tops of the rocks I see him,
And from the hills I behold him.

It is impossible not to perceive the parallels here, though the gradation of sense may not be so immediately obvious to a cursory scrutiny.

From the tops of the rocks I see him.

This was, no doubt, some rocky eminence on the mountain whither Balaam had repaired, in order to obtain a more extensive view of the plain upon which the Israelites were encamped. He was now standing upon the "high places of Baal," probably one of the mountains of Abarim, Peor, Nebo, and Pisgah, belonging to the same range. "The mountains of Abarim spread far

into the tribe of Reuben, and the country of Moab on both sides the Arnon. They were composed of many little hills, under different names. It is impossible to define exactly their extent: Eusebius and Jerome speak of them in several places. Eusebius fixes them at six miles west of Heshbon, and seven east of Livias."* On the words 'the high places of Baal,' Stackhouse observes after Patrick, "The word Baal signifies Lord, and was the name of several gods, both male and female, as Seldon shows (*de Diis Syris*, cap. i.) The god of the Moabites was Chemosh, but here very probably is called by the common name of Baal: and as all nations worshipped their gods upon high places, so this god of Moab, having more places of worship than one, Balak carried Balaam to them all, that from thence he might take the most advantageous prospect of the Israelites. These high places were full of trees and shady groves, which made them commodious, both for the solemn thoughts and prayers of such as were devout, and for the filthy inclinations and abominable practices of such as affected to be wicked." It is clear then that the prophet, when he pronounced the prophecy, was upon a lofty elevation above the plain in which the posterity of Jacob were encamped, he being thus enabled to overlook their whole encampment, for this is implied by the first couplet of the prediction, in both verses of which he declares that he sees the enemy, not in part but entirely. I have said

* See Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, Art. Abarim.

that in this couplet the gradational parallelism is present. In the first hemistich it will be observed that only a part or peculiar locality of the hill is signified :—

From the tops of the rocks I see him.

In the second, the term “ hills ” is used generally to express, no doubt, the great elevation of his position :—

And from the hills I behold him.

He was not only looking from a rocky eminence, but from the hills, the most elevated region in that mountainous district, where the sanctuaries of the heathen deities were erected on account of those high places being seldom trodden by profane feet, and only when the rites of that unholy worship which defiled these degraded shrines were to be consummated. The duplication of the parallel phrases, I apprehend to have been employed merely to express the same thing more emphatically, to give a more graceful turn to the clauses and, above all, to preserve that peculiar but expressive form of construction so often brought to the reader's notice, under the characteristic designation of parallelism, which, as I have already attempted on several occasions to show, forms so decided and specific a feature of Hebrew poetry. Bishop Newton, and justly as I think, considers this passage and that which immediately follows, to refer not only to the present view which Balaam had of the Israelites, but likewise and indeed more emphatically to their final settlement in

Canaan. Both Bishop Lowth's and the common version evidently countenance this interpretation; and indeed, from the context, it appears manifest that while Balaam pointed to the camp occupied by that highly favoured race, concerning whom he pronounces the prophecy contained in the two subsequent lines, to which we shall presently refer, he at the same time represents to the astonished sovereign of Moab, who would willingly have heard a less favourable character of those whom he so deeply detested, that extraordinary union among themselves which distinguished the literal seed of Abraham, not merely during their occupation of the promised land, but continues, even at this remote period, to be the prominent feature of their national character—a character which has exhibited no perceptible change during a lapse of more than three thousand years. They are still “dwelling alone;”—they are not even now “numbered among the nations.”

Reverting to the parallel terms in the first distich of the prophecy, it may appear that *two* of them are merely synonymous, and consequently that a common pleonasm or unnecessary redundancy is produced, but this is by no means the case: the terms are clearly gradational, as a slight consideration will show. Betwixt the words “see” and “behold,” though they may seem upon a superficial view, to express precisely the same sense, there is a nice, indeed, but nevertheless manifest advance of meaning. To *see*, is to perceive generally; to *behold*, to perceive distinctly—it will therefore appear that the one

term is general, the other emphatic; as if the prophet had said, 'from this lofty eminence I can distinguish collectively the camp of the Israelites, whom I have been summoned hither to curse, spread out as far as the eye can stretch its vision, upon the plain below; from the summit of these hills, consecrated to the divinities of Moab, I can *plainly discern* the enemies of Canaan, an innumerable host encamped in the level country beneath this sacred elevation, and threatening the speedy subjugation of the monarch whom I serve. I see them in their unconquerable might under the protection of the living God.' The second line rises above the first in emphasis and force of meaning. This was clearly the poet's intention. The latter may refer to the literal view of the Israelites which Balaam then had, and the former, as Bishop Newton supposes, to his prophetic view of their final settlement in Canaan, and may be paraphrased thus—'from the top of this rock I now see, with my bodily eye, the Israelites before me, a numerous and flourishing people; and from this place I likewise behold with my prophetic eye this same people, occupying the whole land from which I am commanded to exterminate them.'

The distinctions in the parallel terms as just pointed out, may to some appear trivial or subtle hypercriticisms; they are not so, however, in reality, as I think I can better illustrate by a quotation from Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible,* than by any observation of my own.

* Art. Poetry.

"This duplication," says a contributor to the late enlarged edition of that learned work, edited by Taylor, "is so proper to Hebrew poetry, that a Hebrew poet would not be content to say, 'youth and beauty shall be laid in the dust,' but he would singularize these qualities; he would distinguish and repeat them: *e. g.*

Youth shall be laid in the dust,
And beauty shall be consumed in the grave.

"This is more explicit, has greater strength, as well as greater correctness; for beauty is not invariably conjoined with youth, and there is beauty proper to mature life, and even to old age. The ideas then are not precisely the same; yet they are so exquisitely similar, that the recollection of one brings the other to mind instantly."

I now proceed to the next passage of the prophecy, which is remarkable for its singular reference to the future condition of the Israelites, a people of whom Balaam could have known little of himself, and with whose political state in the time to come he could of course have known nothing, but what was revealed to him immediately by God. His prophetic endowment then here becomes manifest :—

Lo ! the people who shall dwell alone,
Nor shall number themselves among the nations.

I continue to quote from Bishop Lowth's translation of this prophetic song, because the poetical structure of it is more strictly observed in his than in our common version, though even there it is sufficiently obvious. In this part of

the prediction, the distinct character of the Israelites is expressed—they are a notable race, separated from the heathen, and distinguished with peculiar marks of divine favour. The Shechinah, that effulgent glory signaling the heavenly presence which overshadowed the mercy-seat or propitiatory of the ark in the ancient tabernacle and temple, was among them. They were pre-eminently a chosen community under the especial protection of Providence. In the two verses above quoted, the gradational parallelism is obvious, the second verse being an exposition of the first, and giving a more extended sense. The declaration contained in the first is general, that in the second particular. They shall be a peculiar people, and therefore separated from the heathen. I would ask, is there a reader of taste who can fail to distinguish the grace and beauty of this arrangement? If the same had been expressed in the most simple and most obvious terms, it would have lost not only much of its expressiveness and of its force, but likewise that elegance of structure which the passage in its present form possesses. This artificial distribution of the clauses is unquestionably a great aid to the picturesque effect of prophetic representation; and I am satisfied that the impression thus created is infinitely stronger than if the declaration had been made in the ordinary prosaic form of speech.

Lo! the people who shall dwell alone.

That is, 'here are the multitudinous seed of the patriarch to whom the land of Canaan was pro-

mised for an inheritance. They shall inhabit it without mixing in social alliances, or political confederacies, with the heathen inhabitants of the region of which they are about to take possession. They are a community who shall keep themselves apart from those idolatrous nations inhabiting the country given by promise to the posterity of Abraham. They shall be a peculiar people, a people kept distinct from the rest of the world, separated from other races by their laws, religion, and social customs.' "And how could Balaam," asks Bishop Newton, "upon a distant view only of the people whom he had never seen or known before, have discovered the genius and manners, not only of the people then living, but of their posterity to the latest generations? What renders it more extraordinary is, the singularity of the character; that they should differ from all the communities of the world, and should dwell by themselves among the nations without mixing or incorporating with any. The time, too, when this is affirmed, increases the wonder, it being before the children of Israel were well known in the world; before their religion and government were established, and even before they had obtained a settlement anywhere. But yet that the character was fully verified in the event, not only all history testifies, but we have even ocular demonstration at this day. The Jews, in their religion and laws, their rites and ceremonies, their manners and customs, were so totally different from all other nations, that they had little intercourse or communion with them."

Bishop Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*,* has satisfactorily shown, that there was a general intercommunity among the gods of paganism; but no such intercommunity was allowed betwixt the God of Israel and the factitious divinities of the heathen. There was to be no fellowship between God and Belial, whatever might exist, and no doubt a fellowship did exist, between Belial and Dagon, for the worshippers of the one were respected in their adoration by the worshippers of the other. There was a mutual acknowledgment of reverence for their mutual idolatries. Hence the Jews were condemned for their general want of urbanity, their haughty and unsocial temper, their extreme asperity and even inhumanity towards aliens; and it must be confessed that they generally detested, and were for the most part held in detestation by those nations who surrounded them or by whom they might chance to come into political collision. Other political communities, both the conquerors and the conquered, have not only frequently associated, but even united as one body under the same administration and laws; but the Jews, in their captivities, have commonly been more bigotted to their own religion, and more tenacious of their own rites and customs, than at other times; and even now, while they are dispersed through all countries, they yet live distinct and separate from all, trading only with others, but eating, marrying, and conversing, among themselves.

* Book ii. sec. 6; and book v. sec. 2.

We see, therefore, how exactly Balaam characterized the whole race, from first to last, when he said,

Lo ! the people shall dwell alone,
Nor shall number themselves among the nations.

This remarkable prediction we have already seen partly fulfilled, and still continue to see in the gradual course of accomplishment up to the present moment, through a period of three thousand three hundred years. This is the people of whom, as it is supposed, some unhappy Levite at Babylon, during the captivity of Israel, so pathetically sang in the hundred and thirty-seventh psalm, a composition of exquisite tenderness and beauty.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows,
In the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song;
And they that wasted us required of us mirth,
Saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a strange land ?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning !
If I do not remember thee,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth ;
If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom
In the day of Jerusalem ; who said,
Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed ;
Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee, as thou hast served us.
Happy shall he be that taketh
And dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Balaam indeed did not foresee the miseries to which the Israelites would be reduced under the

tyrant of Babylon, but was only permitted to foretell their prosperity after their settlement in the land of promise before the schism of Jero-boam, and the calamities which thence ensued. What a vast idea does the reluctant diviner suggest of their number at the moment when the prophetic rapture was upon him.

Who shall count the *dust* of Jacob,
Or the number of the fourth of Israel?

The dust of Jacob is an extremely happy metaphor, expressive of the prodigious increase of his posterity after they had passed the river Jordan, and were about to invade the territories of Balak. Here, too, is a full ratification of God's promise to Abraham. "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth"*—and repeated afterwards to Jacob. "And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."†

Or the number of the fourth of Israel.

"The whole host of Israel," says Bishop Patrick, "was divided into four camps under the standard of Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan, as we read in the second chapter of Numbers, one of which camps lay more plainly before him than the rest; namely, that on the west under the standard of Ephraim." The meaning of the passage, as Dodd well observes, is, "how vast

* Genesis xiii. 16.

† Ibid. xxviii. 14.

is the number of this people, when one of their camps is so numerous as to be almost past reckoning."

This must have been a terrifying announcement to the pusillanimous Moabite who hoped to have defeated his new enemies, not with arms, but with maledictions. Nothing can well convey a stronger impression of multitude than the terms employed by the bard in the distich now under consideration. Their variation is extremely artful and apposite; not only is the whole seed of Jacob as dust, but so numerous are they, that even a fourth part are beyond the powers of computation. This is clearly a poetical exaggeration, and does not therefore assume to be literally true, but it certainly does convey a very lively impression, not only of the number, but likewise of the importance of that community, who, within a few centuries, had multiplied so exceedingly, as to have become formidable to the most potent monarchs upon earth. The great beauty of a discreet use of the hyperbole consists in its being so applied as to strengthen the force of an object upon the mind, without assuming for itself the character of a literal truth. It broadly states an impossibility, but it is its just application to what is possible and true, which constitutes its pertinency to the purpose for which it is used. If a man were compared to a mountain, we should see at once that the comparison could not literally hold, but when the idea suggested by such comparison simply is, that the man is relatively as much taller than his fellow-men as a

lofty mountain is higher than an ordinary range of hills, then the exaggeration ceases to be felt, and we instantly admit its propriety and coherence. In like manner, the dust of Jacob does not really lead to the inference that it was as impossible to count the Israelites as to number the grains of dust scattered over the face of the country, but takes us immediately to the fact that they were a vast multitude, formidable by their numbers and hostile array, for that was the direct object of this part of the prophecy; and it clearly seems to have excited the apprehensions of Balak, as he conducted Balaam to an eminence where he could only behold part of the Israelitish camp, hoping that a more diminished view would produce a less unfavourable oracle.

Let my soul die the death of the righteous,
And let my end be as his.

“These words may be regarded as a prophecy, foretelling the happy state of future Israel. Balak, alarmed at the success of the Israelites, had sent to Balaam to curse them. A present danger struck him with terror; a present deliverance was the object of all his thoughts: but Balaam’s answer is, ‘how shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?’ And then, in few words, he proceeds to state the multitudes and the growing prosperity of the people, instead of their being cut off and driven out: (see verse 8—10.) This is the sum of the blessing which he pronounced; and that it was a blessing directly contrary to what was desired, a curse of immediate discomfiture, the answer of Balak declares.

All that Balaam uttered afterwards was rather an amplification of this his first and immediate blessing, which was designed to show that Israel should not be destroyed, but should be of long continuance, and ultimately happy in the blessings of God. 'Let me die the death of the righteous,' or, as the righteous ones die; full of days—long life being promised to those who feared God.* "It has been generally supposed," says Dr. Adam Clarke, "that Balaam is here praying for a happy death, such as true Christians die who die in the Lord; and in this way his words are generally applied; but I am satisfied this is not their meaning." The learned Doctor gives no reason whatever for this categorical decision, but being satisfied with his own conclusion, seems to take for granted that all who read his note must, as a matter of course, come to the same; few readers, however, will, I imagine, be content to take Dr. Adam Clarke's satisfaction for proof, that the general application of the words to which he refers is wrong. It is a pity he did not show upon what his determination of the question was grounded.

The conclusion of Balaam's first prophecy is thus commented upon by Bishop Warburton. Referring to the closing couplet, he says:† "This is understood as a wish that Balaam might be partaker with the righteous in another life. Had the apostate prophet said, 'let me live the life of the righteous,' it would have had a much fairer claim for such a meaning. As it

* See note in Doyly's and Mant's Bible. † Divine Leg. book vi. sec. 2.

is, the force of the words, and their relation to the context, restrain us to this literal meaning : ‘ Let me die in a mature old age, after a life of health and peace, with all my posterity flourishing about me ; as was the lot of the righteous observers of the law.’ This vain wish, Moses, I suppose, recorded, that the subsequent account of Balaam’s immature death in battle (chapter xxxi. 8) might make the stronger impression on the serious reader, to warn him against the impiety and folly of expecting the last reward of virtue for a life spent in the gratification of every corrupt appetite. But if any one will say the words have besides a sublimer meaning, I have no reason to contend with them.” “ Let my last end be like his,” may be rendered, “ let my posterity be like his :” and so it is found in the Septuagint. The Gemara, being the second or supplementary part of the Talmud, so called because, as the word implies, it is the completion or perfection of that rabbinical depository of tradition, recommends the interpretation given by the seventy. ‘ May I die, neither by a violent nor immature death ; which was peculiarly promised to those Israelites who kept the law.’

In the Gemara will be frequently found valuable commentaries upon the difficult passages of Scripture. Bishop Sherlock, in his sermon upon this text, understands the words in this sense, as referring to temporal posterity. Houbigant, however, is of opinion that the words have a much higher sense. He supposes the righteous not to mean the contumacious Israelites, but those whom that people prefigured, for he says

that the parable of Balaam is of the same kind with the parables of our Saviour. "Balaam wishes," he observes, "so to survive his fate, as they will do, who shall die the death of the just; signifying by this wish, the future immortality of the just, an immortality to be desired by every human creature."

It is a good remark which a commentator makes upon the text, that all mankind have a desire after happiness and the reward of virtue; but few have resolution to withstand the temptations of vice, and maintain their integrity against the allurements of wordly honours, riches, and sensual pleasures. "Just so," says Epictetus; "many would be conquerors at the Olympic games; many would be philosophers, like Socrates, though they have no inclination to submit to the previous and necessary steps. He that would win the crown must contend."*

"Oh, let me die his death!" all nature cries;

"Then live his life"—all nature falters there.

Young, *Night 5*.

Throughout the whole of this first prophecy of Balaam, the parallelisms, as I have before observed, cannot fail to be traced, and in each distich they impart an elegant variety to the sense, besides adding very materially to the general effect of the description. The concluding line may appear, upon a hasty consideration of it, a mere unmeaning repetition of the same idea expressed in the preceding clause in different words; but a brief examination will,

* See Dodd's note.

I think, remove the impression. Taking the passage in its common and most obvious acceptance, we shall see a nice distinction of variety in the sense between the two verses, though apparently representing the same thought. The thoughts, however, are not the same, but analagous only.

Let my soul die the death of the righteous.

That is, when I am overtaken by death, may my soul be in a condition to meet this dreaded visitor like that of the righteous man who fears not his approach, but rather welcomes him, as the harbinger of a new existence where death shall cease to exercise his dreadful supremacy, for the end of his humanity shall be the beginning of a joyful immortality.

And let my end be as his.

That is, may I, like the righteous man, when my probation shall be accomplished, ascend to a life of everlasting blessedness, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Oh! ye blest scenes of permanent delight!
Full above measure, lasting beyond bound!
Could you, so rich in rapture, fear an end,
That ghastly thought would drink up all your joy,
And quite unparadise the realms of light.
Safe are you lodged above those rolling spheres,
The baleful influence of whose giddy dance,
Sheds sad vicissitude on all beneath.*

* Young, Night 1st.

Herder's version of Balaam's first prophecy cannot be out of place here, I therefore, without hesitation, introduce it:—

Balak, the king of Moab, brought me from Aram,
 Called me from the mountains of the east.
 Come hither, and curse me Jacob;
 Come hither, and denounce Israel.
 How can I curse whom God hath not cursed?
 How can I denounce whom God hath not denounced?
 From this rocky summit I behold the nation,
 From the mountain tops I survey them.
 Behold a people that dwelleth alone
 And joins itself not with the nations.
 Who can count the dust of Jacob?
 Or number the fourth of Israel?
 Let me die the death of the righteous,
 And let my last end be like his.

It will be readily seen that this version differs little from our authorized translation, except that a nicer regard is had to the metrical distribution of the phrases. The sense is nearly the same, but the rhythmical arrangement is more accurately observed.

With reference to the two concluding lines of this singular prediction, I would observe, that Balaam, though a wicked man, but nevertheless a true prophet, might have naturally expressed such a wish, although he did not entertain very ardent expectations of its accomplishment. Nothing could well show Balak, in a stronger light, the high moral distinction of the Israelites than such an expression from such a man, who had travelled from the mountains of Mesopotamia for the express purpose of imprecating an exterminating malediction upon them. The word "righteous" in the closing couplet, to my apprehension, decidedly refers to the people whom Balaam was commanded to curse. It was God's

will that he should bless them, and not only so, but that he should hold them up, generally, 'as patterns of moral behaviour to the obscene and idolatrous Moabites. They are accordingly placed, by the prophet of Pethor, in striking contrast with the worshippers of Baal and of Chemosh, their spiritual superiority being not only admitted, but proclaimed by one of the bitterest enemies of their race. This declaration of the disappointed seer was very likely a sudden stroke of conscience, which compelled him to close his prediction with a personal testimony in favour of those whom he had so wickedly, and without the slightest provocation, sought to injure; and surely no testimony could be stronger than wishing that his death and everlasting futurity might be like theirs.

Nothing can well be finer or more impressive than the close of this early specimen of Hebrew poetry. It is every way worthy of admiration. Nevertheless, upon a strict examination, we shall find that its beauty and impressiveness are referable chiefly to its elevated fervour, to its pure and dignified simplicity. It owes nothing to the ordinary embellishments of language, nor to the display of figures: indeed, there is only one metaphor introduced throughout the whole poem—

Who shall count the *dust* of Jacob—

which stands in a position of grand, though solitary, singularity. Notwithstanding, however, this absence of elaboration and paucity of ornament, the entire composition is eminently poetical. There is a graphic grandeur and a con-

densed energy in the descriptions, which bring them to the imagination with a sort of electric force, and leave us nothing to wish for on the score of rhetorical embellishment. We only feel disposed to regret that so fine a genius should have possessed so bad a heart; admiring the mind, while we cannot but detest the man.

I shall now conclude this chapter with an extremely eloquent passage from Herder's work on the spirit of Hebrew poetry, which has risen to very high celebrity in Germany. Referring to the prophecies of Balaam, he says:* "From a man of such imagination we should expect effusions of a bold and elevated character; and such his prophecies are. They possess the highest dignity, brevity, animation, and copiousness of imagery. There is little in the later prophets, and nothing in the discourses of Moses, that equals them in this respect. They stand somewhere in the same rank with the book of Job; and the narrative, by which they are introduced, with all those dreams and visions, with the fearful climax of warnings, the various high places with seven altars upon each—all this is so simple, told with such emphasis and symmetry of parts, that we seem to be brought, by a kind of magic ladder, to that for which such preparation is made." These are the observations of a man of exquisite taste and quick sensibility, though occasionally prone to indulge in dreamy speculations. He is nevertheless an acute biblical critic.

* Vol. ii. p. 174.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The beauties of Hebrew poetry abridged by translation. Many pious persons unconscious of its existence. Absurdity in supposing there can be any impiety in admiring it as poetry. Admiration one of the sources of pure enjoyment. How much the lovers of fine poetry lose by not reading the Bible. The prophecies of Balaam especially remarkable for poetic graces of the highest order. Miles Coverdale's Bible.

ALTHOUGH, as I have endeavoured to show, the first of those prophetic songs ascribed by Moses to Balaam is superlatively beautiful as a production of human genius, exhibiting in an eminent degree the most attractive graces of composition, still the predictions which follow are distinguished in a still more eminent degree by the higher attributes of poetry. Notwithstanding that those attributes are in a measure obscured by being presented through the medium of a translation, in which some of the more delicate tints of colouring are lost, because they are too refined, too transitive, too immediately akin, either to the idiom or to the structure of the Hebrew, to be transfused into a language characterized by qualites so oppugnant to that of the primitive races as our own: it will nevertheless be obvious to the most obtuse taste, that the poetry of the Bible excels that of the best

compositions of any people, ancient or modern, with whom we are acquainted. It is allowed by the most competent judges to transcend the noblest productions of the Greeks, who stand at the head of all civilized communities for the surpassing excellence of their writings, whether philosophical or poetical. This circumstance alone, that is, the sublime pre-eminence of the Bible, considered only upon the ground of its literary merits, without any reference to its inspiration, should naturally excite our desire to become masters of its riches ; but when we consider that the sacred volume is likewise the treasury of divine truth—the grand reservoir of celestial wisdom, from which the numerous channels of religious knowledge are supplied, and whence the unpolluted waters of salvation are diffused over the wilderness of human infirmity, clothing it in the verdure of righteousness, and fructifying it to a harvest to be laid up in the inexhaustible garner of heaven—can we open those sacred pages without feeling our delight blended with the deepest veneration, our sense of the beauties there displayed heightened by our consciousness that those words which they embellish are the words of revelation—the words of eternal life ?

It is no doubt true that many pious persons who daily resort to their Bibles, as a holy exercise to stimulate their devotions, are utterly insensible to those exquisite qualities of composition in which that inspired book abounds ; but the great mass of such persons, many of whom may be truly said, without any grave

disparagement, to be more holy than wise, fail to perceive the beauties of the various productions which it comprises, chiefly because they look upon the secondary enjoyment, derived from the perusal of lofty and ennobling thoughts conveyed in elegant and poetical language, as altogether incompatible with a profitable study of the sacred records, containing those infallible promises upon which the hopes of salvation, and thus the encouragements to righteousness, are grafted, and therefore to be read solely for the purpose of treasuring up that knowledge which supplies the clue of escape from the labyrinth of sin. This may be a very pious feeling, but it is nevertheless a very mistaken one. Such persons ought to consider that innocent gratification cannot be inconsistent with the purest, nay with the most fervent devotion ; for admiration of any kind, excited by the composition of the sacred Scriptures, must elevate, and can by no moral possibility depress the pious fervour of a really devout reader. Moreover those overweening pietists, who would fain persuade themselves that to appreciate the poetical or rhetorical beauties of the Bible is a kind of intellectual impiety, ought to understand, that if the highest ornaments of poetical diction had been in any imaginable degree inconsistent with the solemn truths of Holy Writ, it is certain they never would have been employed in those writings, produced under divine sanction, and communicating the revelations of that "wisdom which is from above." Is it not much more reasonable to suppose that the infallible God

who imparted the subjects of his revelations, permitted them to be delivered, for the benefit of all times, in such forms of language as best suited those heavenly oracles ; still, this might have been done without suggesting the very words in which those oracles were conveyed, for the language merely, does not certainly exhibit any specific marks of divinity, though the truth which that language reveals undoubtedly does. We cannot then, with any show of reason, be precluded from admiring what the Deity has so graciously sanctioned ; and admiration, it must be conceded, is one, and that, too, the most prominent, of the many sources of enjoyment. Not only so, but it is likewise, in numerous instances, an effectual instrument of devotion. We may, then, safely and laudably encourage the delight derived to us from reading the poetry of the Bible, without attaching to ourselves the suspicion that we do not read this inspired book with a spiritual appetite ; for depend upon it, the true Christian who most admires the richness of its language and the splendid adornments of its poetry, will best appreciate its wisdom and the ineffable truths with which it is so abundantly stored.

Can any one seriously imagine for a moment, that the true believer, who reads the Holy Scriptures with a deep relish of those beauties which belong to them as the compositions of men—of men, indeed, divinely endowed and commissioned to proclaim God's communications to their erring brethren, nevertheless exercising their own high faculties in the development

and proclamation of those inspirations which they were commissioned by the Divinity to deliver—can we, I ask again, imagine that the true believer who so reads the Hebrew Scriptures, will peruse them with less devotion, or with a feebler sense of their importance, because his feelings are elevated to rapture by that eloquence and sublimity for which these writings are so eminently conspicuous? If they are really calculated to excite such feelings, as it is the province of all sublime writings to awaken, why should not this be held out as an inducement—secondary, if you will, to the paramount purpose of becoming “wise unto salvation,” but still strong and abiding—to peruse the inspired volume, when the admiration thus produced is so well calculated, and, indeed, so likely to forward those more elevated sentiments of spiritual devotion, which, repudiating the form and maintaining only the essence, bring the serious Christian into nearer communion with his God?

It is abundantly evident, from the various productions composing the sacred volume, that the Deity selected men endowed by him with the rarest genius to promulgate his revelations; as is shown by the prodigious power and superlative excellence of their writings contained in that treasury of divine wisdom, the Bible. It is therefore to be presumed, that the admiration of the pious cannot be offensive to God, where they do not withhold from him their reverence, their adoration, and humble affiance.

The righteousness of those persons who affect to hold in contempt the gratification derived

from the perusal of Hebrew poetry, apart from the benefit accruing from the study of divine truths, may be fairly suspected, for I have no hesitation in declaring my belief, that they who are incapable of appreciating the poetry of the Bible, as well as its wisdom and inspiration, possess little of that glowing fervour of soul, combined with deep abasement of heart, without which piety is but an empty name, and scripture reading, consequently, a profitless study ; for let it ever be borne in mind, that “ they are not all Israel which are of Israel.”*

Those persons who have never looked into their Bibles can scarcely be aware what they have lost, or rather what they have failed to gain, but which, nevertheless, they may still find, if they will only take the trouble to search for it. From its inexhaustible stores may not only be obtained the bread of life and those waters which the wells of salvation have supplied, but gems of priceless value, that befit and enhance the splendour of heavenly things, from which the idea of grandeur, as well as of bliss, can never be dissociated ; for grandeur is inseparable from a being infinite and eternal, surrounded by myriads of adoring spirits. Solomon’s temple, the glory of Israel, in which was the Holy of Holies, a type of the celestial sanctuary, was not only composed of materials from the quarry, but likewise from the mine. Gold and the most precious gems adorned that magnificent edifice, so solemnly consecrated to God. Why, then, should we not

* Romans ix. 6.

equally admire the adornments of the spiritual temple—that divine repository of revelation, the Bible—that impregnable citadel of the Christian's faith, of which God has "appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks."

It is lamentable to see Christians affect to think any admiration of the Bible beyond that of its spiritual efficacy would be the indulgence of an unholy gratification. Such persons ought to know, that beauty, of whatever kind, unless accompanied by moral deformity, will ever be an object of delight; it must consequently have been designed by the Deity to elicit the admiration of his creatures, else why was it produced? To admire what he has created, if no impure feeling accompany our admiration, is a positive act of devotion. It will perhaps scarcely be credited, that there is a vast number of highly endowed persons, ardent lovers of literature, especially of poetry, fully alive to the vast merit of the heathen writers, and to the high qualifications of those great ornaments of their own country whose names are enrolled among the renowned of all times, who have, notwithstanding, still to learn that the richest treasures of the poetic art are to be found in that book which they have, perhaps, never yet taken the trouble, or felt the least curiosity, to open. It is difficult to account for such strange perversity of taste, unless we suppose that they are afraid to unclose its sacred pages lest they should be seduced to abandon their favourite errors of infidelity, and believe the important truths conveyed in Holy Writ. Once induce the unbeliever earnestly to read

the Bible, and if he be a person either of judgment or of discernment, he cannot fail to admire the beauties of its language and the sublimity of the sentiments which accompany its numerous records, precepts, and predictions; such admiration, I feel satisfied, would finally turn to devotion.

As we proceed with the prophecies of Balaam, we shall perceive the remarks which I have applied to Hebrew poetry in the mass abundantly verified in the detail. They are bright examples of its greatest qualities. The obscurity, indeed, of those sublime productions, will, as a matter of course, subtract from their beauty in the estimation of the less intellectual, less earnest, or less instructed reader; nevertheless, the richness of the imagery, the glowing warmth but pure harmony of colouring, the grandeur of the metaphors, the bold application yet judicious propriety of the figures, together with the vast elevation of the thoughts and sentiments, cannot fail to strike an attentive reader of ordinary taste and penetration.

It must indeed be admitted that many beauties of the sacred volume, and particularly its poetical beauties, have not been transmitted to us, from the difficulty which naturally exists in representing in a comparatively new language those forms of expression so peculiarly germane to the original, as to be incapable of transfusion. Besides, it is more than doubtful that the learned translators of the Bible now in use among us recognized all the poetical fragments existing in the Pentateuch; but although they treated these sublime compositions as mere prose, they

have nevertheless frequently exhibited their beauties with singular felicity and admirable truth. The very circumstance of our authorized translation having been made by so many hands, which, according to Fuller's list, amounted to forty-seven of the most eminent Hebrew scholars in this country, naturally renders it the more complete; an assumption which will be confirmed by the following judicious remarks of Miles Coverdale in his translation of the Bible, bearing date 1535, and dedicated to King Henry the Eighth.

"Now, whereas the most famous interpreters of all geve sondrye judgmentes on the texte (so far as it is donne by the spiryte of knowledge in the Holye Gooste) methynke no man shoulde be offended thereat, for they referre theyr doynges in mekenes to the spiryte of trueth in the congregation of God: and sure I am that there commethe more knowledge and understandinge of the Scripture by their sondrye translacions, than by all the gloses of our sophisticall doctours. For that one interpreteth somthyng obscurely in one place, the same translateth another (or els he himselfe) more manifestly, by a more playne vocable of the same meaning, in another place."

This passage shows the liberal temper and unbiassed spirit of that truly great but ill-used man.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Balaam prepares to announce the divine oracle a second time. Erection of the seven altars. The septenary sacrifices repeated. The field of Zophim. Some observations on animal sacrifice.

I SHALL now proceed to the consideration of Balaam's second prophecy. No sooner had the bard of Pethor, after the erection of the seven altars, and the holocausts offered upon them, according no doubt to the pagan formularies, delivered the oracle which had been communicated, than Balak expressed his disappointment in terms of petulant reproach, taxing the unrighteous prophet with having run counter to his injunctions, and implying that he had wantonly done this in direct violation of an express covenant ratified by princely donations and vast promises of future aggrandizement; for it is clear by the surprise expressed, that the sovereign of Moab had no idea of the divine compulsion under which the mercenary diviner acted, against his own express determination. Balaam, unwilling to lose the rewards depending upon his execrating the posterity of Jacob, although he stated his inability to declare anything but what the Lord should "put into his mouth," signified nevertheless his readiness to make another at-

tempt to render him favourable to the king's desire, probably persuading himself that as he had received the divine permission to accompany the Moabitish princes, God might still allow him to accomplish that object for which he had undertaken the journey to Balak's capital. Though the prophet had been disappointed in the revelation which he received after his first appeal to the Divinity, he no doubt hoped that the second would be attended with a result more favourable to the wish of his employer.

It is utterly impossible to interpret correctly the feelings of a man so well practised in the wiles of hypocrisy, and so hedged round by the arts and mysteries of that craft by which, as I take it, his reputation as a diviner had been chiefly gained; for though a true prophet, there can be little doubt that he was deeply skilled in the arcana of magic, since it is in the character of a magician that he was applied to by the emissaries of Balak, it being the province of such persons alone to imprecate maledictions upon an invading enemy. Still, however impossible to ascertain precisely the sentiments of this unrighteous man, there can be no question as to his anxious desire to obtain the rewards of divination, which he could only secure by obeying the king's commands; and this, I feel assured, he expected God would eventually permit him to do. Under this impression, or rather, perhaps, actuated by this hope, he accompanied the sovereign of Moab to the field of Zophim, which was on the summit of Pisgah, the highest part of the chain of mountains opposite to Jericho, on the road

from Betharan to Heshbon. Pisgah is the celebrated mount to which Moses retired immediately before his death, in order to take a view of the promised land, which extended beneath so far as the eye could reach. Here, having for a while contemplated those fertile plains, of which the numerous hosts whom he had led for upwards of forty years through the wilderness were about to take possession, he resigned his soul into the hands of him who gave it, and was buried in the valley over against Beth-Peor, but in so secret a manner, that his grave could never be discovered, lest his relics should become objects of superstitious veneration among the posterities of those whom he had so often led to conquest, and finally to that land of promise of which they ultimately obtained the inheritance, and became one of the most distinguished communities among the nations of the earth.

The field of Zophim, whither Balaam was conducted by Balak after his failure upon the high places of Baal, is said to have been a small plain near the summit of Mount Pisgah. It was supposed to be a place where sentinels were stationed in time of war to give notice of an enemy's approach. Of Pisgah, Calmet says, in his dictionary, on the word, it "is a mountain beyond Jordan in Moab. The mountains Nebo, Pisgah, and Abarim, make but one chain near mount Peor, over against Jericho, on the road from Sinai to Heshbon. See Eusebius and Jerome on Nebo and Abarim." In the additions the following passage occurs :—"In the Hebrew

text (Deut. xxxiv. 1—3), the prospect enjoyed by Moses from Pisgah reaches from Dan north, to Zoar south; but in the Samaritan Pentateuch it is much more extensive: ‘all the land from the river of Egypt to the river, the great river Euphrates, to the utmost sea.’ This was the extent of Solomon’s dominions, and the utmost bounds of the royal power of the kings of the Israelites. But another use may be made of this passage, not without its importance. Could this whole district be seen from any other mountain than Pisgah? Was this the same extent as was shown by the tempter to our Lord when exciting his ambition? ‘All this, the utmost bounds that ever were enjoyed by the ancient kings of thy nation, from whom thou art descended; all the whole kingdom and dominion of thine ancestors will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.’ This may account for the term used by St. Luke (iv. 5) rendered in our version, ‘all the world.’

“We have had formerly occasion to regret that we have no views from the tops of mountains described to us by travellers. Such a circumstance might determine on what mountain this temptation was presented to our Lord; and perhaps, also, the order of the temptations, which is now subject to different opinions.”

Balak, supposing that the prophet of Pethor, terrified at beholding the formidable array of the Israelites in the plains beneath, had blessed them under the influence of apprehension of personal consequences, conducted him to a spot in the plain of Zophim, whence he could only see a

comparatively small portion of the hostile camp. Here the seven altars were erected, and the sacrifices offered upon them as before. So solemn a preparation was excellently well calculated to give great effect to the whole transaction; and the gentile monarch appears to have had such confidence in its efficacy, that, in spite of his late disappointment, he looked forward to the realization of his wishes as a result of which there could be no reasonable question. So bent was he upon the accomplishment of the destruction of those dreaded enemies, whom he imagined would be unable to resist the potent enchantments which had been prepared to overwhelm them, that he assisted at the sacrifices with the promptest alacrity, and calmly awaited the return of the reputed magician, who had retired, as on the previous occasion, to meet the Lord Jehovah, the God of Israel, at a distance from the altars of burnt-offering.

Before we proceed, perhaps a few words will not be out of place here upon the subject of animal sacrifice. In the instance before us it was evidently made in accordance with the peculiar rites of heathen superstition; still we cannot fail to observe that it was practised through the whole term of the Jewish economy, up to the period when our blessed Lord came upon earth, to abrogate the ceremonial law and to establish a better covenant than that which had hitherto, since the fall, been imposed upon his creatures, and called, by way of eminence, the everlasting covenant, because the fruits of it were not confined to time, but were to continue throughout

the incalculable period of endless duration. That sacrifice was a divine institution has been denied by many great men, both Christians and Jews, among the former of whom may be numbered St. Chrysostom, Spencer, Hugh le Groot, better known as Hugo Grotius, and Bishop Warburton; among the latter, Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, commonly called Maimonides, Rabbi Levi Ben Gershom, and Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel. All these writers concur in supposing that sacrifices of slain beasts were a human institution, but that the Deity allowed them to be introduced into his worship, in order to prevent their being added to the abominable practices of idolatry. These writers suppose that he did not even approve of, but merely sanctioned them, as a less evil, for the purpose of obviating a greater. How so absurd an idea could have entered the minds of such pious men it is difficult to conceive; for how is it possible that a perfect, just, and omnipotent Being, at once infinite and everlasting, should sanction what he did not approve? This would have been to do wrong, since what God did not approve could not be right, and if he sanctioned what was not right, it is manifest that he must have committed an act of wrong, a matter utterly beyond the bounds of possibility, and, in fact, too absurd to need a serious refutation. That sacrifices were of divine appointment there can be no doubt, since the Deity accepted them, and he would scarcely have done so had they been of human institution, because not only the law of nature contained a prohibition against the shedding of blood, but likewise because it is in

every sense a direct violation of the first law of humanity, since animal food was not eaten by the antediluvian races. It could hardly have entered such primitive and unsullied minds as those of Adam and Abel to slay innocent beasts as a welcome offering to God, unless he who was their instructor, in spite of their transgression, had communicated to them that it would be so, of which they else could not have been aware. They were instructed, no doubt, in the purpose of those immolations, and knew that they prefigured that one great sacrifice for sin to be offered up in the remote future, and of which a faint but intelligible intimation had been given immediately after the fall. Besides, there is no possible way of accounting for the skins in which our first parents were clothed after their lapse from innocence, before their expulsion from Eden, but upon the supposition that they were the hides of victims slain in sacrifice; and if these sacrifices were not of divine appointment, it is clear that Adam must have intuitively hit upon an expedient for offering an atonement to God and for clothing his own and Eve's body, directly after his fall, even before the angel had led him and his erring partner from the bowers of paradise. The improbability of such an occurrence is so great, that it may be said to amount almost to an impossibility. How sacrifices came to be introduced into the obscene rites of idolatry may be accounted for from the fact, that idolatry is only a corruption, gross, indeed, and abominable, of a pure and perfect worship, in which are retained some of its

pristine observances. The sacrifices of the heathen temple are not to be numbered among the impure rites of pagan worship, but, in fact, palpably show, that in the religious services of every country there still remain some notations of that origin whence all forms of worship, whether christian or pagan, primitively sprang, the latter indeed blended with the most revolting rites, but still retaining sufficient marks of identification to prove its original cognation with that patriarchal worship which existed before the flood, and continued, though augmented by new forms and rites, under the whole Jewish dispensation, until the day-star of our salvation arose, with healing in his wings, to bring life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Balaam's and Balak's sacrifices of seven bullocks and of seven rams, were not offensive to God because the blood of animals was shed in them; it was only in connexion with the idolatrous rites of which they were made to form a part—for in themselves, abstractedly, they were but types of the great sacrifice of atonement, to be consummated in time—that they did not become welcome oblations to him who had promised salvation to man through the offering of the lamb without spot. They were, moreover, offerings of propitiation for an evil purpose, which it did not become the creature to make, and consequently became not the Creator to grant. These burnt-offerings, then, though they formed a prominent feature of heathen worship, since such were likewise admitted into the Jewish, and approved of God, the prophet of Pethor might

possibly have supposed would not have been unacceptable to the Lord Jehovah, though he evidently showed but little confidence in their efficacy, since, when he invoked the Deity, he retired from the altars to a remote part of the mountain, and left Balak to watch the holocaust.

The whole of this history conveys an admirable lesson to the upholders of infidelity, showing the weakness and inefficacy of any reliance but upon the only wise God, who is "wonderful in power and excellent in working." "He is God and none else." To those only who believe in and obey him will he vouchsafe his mercy. What availed the numerous and oft-repeated sacrifices of bullocks and of rams upon altars erected to a pagan divinity, against the determinations of an omnipotent and immutable will? They were as chaff before the wind.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Balaam's second prophecy.

AFTER the second course of sacrifices had been made of seven bulls and of seven rams, Balaam returned from the place, whither he had retired in order to receive the divine communication, with "the word which God had put into his mouth." Upon reaching the altars, near which the king of Moab was still standing, he thus addressed that wicked prince:—

Rise up, Balak, and hear ;
Hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor !
God is not a man that he should lie ;
Neither the son of man that he should repent :
Hath he said, and shall he not do it ?
Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?
Behold I have received commandment to bless :
And he hath blessed ; and I cannot reverse it.
He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob,
Neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel :
The Lord his God is with him,
And the shout of a king is among them.
God brought them out of Egypt ;
He hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.
Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob,
Neither is there any divination against Israel :
According to this time it shall be said
Of Jacob and of Israel, what hath God wrought !
Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion,
And lift up himself as a young lion :
He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey,
And drink of the blood of the slain.

Of Balaam's prophecies, Bishop Lowth says,* "each is possessed of a certain accuracy of arrangement and symmetry of form. They open with an elegant exordium, they proceed with a methodical continuation of the subject, and are wound up with a full and graceful conclusion."

It has been already seen how justly Lowth's remarks apply to the first of these inspired compositions; it remains to be seen that they will apply with even greater force to those which follow. In the first couplet of the second prophecy, which has been taken literally from the authorized Bible version, but divided into hemistichs as in the original text, it will be observed that the structure is precisely similar to the first of the preceding prophecy, as translated by Bishop Lowth. There is a direct inversion of the parallels:—

Rise up, Balak, and hear ;
Hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor.

A trifling change would have greatly improved the poetical distribution of this distich. In the first hemistich, there is no reason why the name of the king of Moab should have stood in the centre, to the manifest interruption of the natural sequence of the sense. How much more dignified, as well as simple, would it have been if rendered according to the natural order of the words, "Balak, rise up and hear;" besides an agreeable epanode would have been produced,

* Twentieth Prælection.

which is now broken by their inappropriate distribution. Suppose we were to read,

Balak, rise up and hear :
Hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor,

and the epanode is at once complete, besides exhibiting a perfect and elegant parallelism. *Hear* and *hearken* respectively end and commence the first and second clauses; the same may be said of the person addressed as "Balak" and the "son of Zippor," both being identical. The manner in which the parallel terms are varied, especially the two latter, manifests a careful attention to the effect of the composition. The poetical character is here not only undoubtedly present, but it is palpable that especial regard was had to metrical proportion in the exhibition of these parallelisms. An extremely graceful turn is given to this distich, by the mere dexterous management and pertinent adaptation of the phraseology, which is no less appropriate than expressive. The commencement is uncommonly striking. "Rise up, Balak, and hear," or, Balak, rise up and hear, which latter collocation of the terms would have more completely preserved the symmetry of the verse, and at the same time have better maintained the contrasted position of the parallels. Had our translators perceived the artificial design in these beautiful poems, which I feel satisfied they did not, they would have frequently rendered their admirable version more poetical, though they might not have given, upon the whole, a better sense. There is certainly great

dignity in the opening of the prophet's address to the sovereign of Moab. He therein assumes the authority of a delegate of the most high God, before whom kings are as dust, and in whose sight the whole circumference of the vast circle of time is but as the gossamer wheel described by the spider's web. The service in which the unrighteous seer of Mesopotamia is engaged by an earthly potentate, is superseded by that which he is called upon to fulfil by a heavenly. He cannot serve two masters. His duty to God prevails over his unholy obligations to man. Coming fresh from a special intercourse with the august majesty of heaven, his soul elevated by the divine influence of inspiration, the rapt seer delivered those revelations, which he was commissioned to proclaim, in language at once imposing, solemn, and sublime. There is something inexpressibly lofty in the whole of these poems. Throughout Balaam appears to be sensible of the extraordinary dignity acquired by having been admitted to immediate communication with the Supreme of heaven and earth, withholding all the formalities of state ceremony, and commencing his annunciation to the king with solemn but peremptory command. He clearly shows how highly he thought the spiritual prevailed over the temporal power. He assumes that personal dignity to which he considered his special communion with God had advanced him, and unhesitatingly addresses the sovereign, whose commands he had undertaken under certain limitations to fulfil, in a tone which indicates conscious superiority, at least in mental

and spiritual endowments. He applies to the royal Moabite none of those conventional forms of distinction, which, by the general consent of mankind, exclusively belong to royalty, but addresses him simply as an ordinary man, bidding him listen with devout reverence to the sacred oracle which he was about to unfold. He compares himself as God's vicegerent, and speaks with a voice of authority; his words having rather the force of a command than the more subservient tone of ordinary supplication. This seems likewise to be felt by the heathen monarch, for when the oracle is delivered he takes no exception either to the tone or manner in which it is communicated to him, but merely to the substance of it. He does not upbraid Balaam with having treated him with disrespect, but only with blessing instead of cursing the Israelites.

If we examine the parallels of the opening couplet in the introductory part of Balaam's second prediction, we shall find them to be palpably gradational. Hearken is unquestionably a stronger expression than hear; it is a near relative but by no means a strictly synonymous expression. "Hear," as I have observed elsewhere,* signifies simply to listen, but "hearken" implies the superlative of the same act, that is, to listen with profound attention; as if he had said, 'not only attend to what I am commissioned to communicate, but let it make the deepest impression upon you, an impression commensurate with its importance and consonant

* Pages 73 and 139.

to the dignity of that august Being from whom it proceeds.' "Thou son of Zippor" has a signification far above the simple utterance of the monarch's name; the correlative adjunct greatly enhances the sense, and not only so, but it adds an agreeable variety to the language, which imparts to it more grace as well as greater comprehensiveness. It would, moreover, naturally recal to the son's memory the virtues of his deceased father, which, if they much exceeded those of the son, would in all likelihood, at such a moment, have had the effect of striking his conscience with a stronger conviction of his own wickedness. It conveyed therefore a covert reproof, the force of which was more likely to be felt than the intention perceived. We here see how wisely the Deity drew good out of evil, causing the foolishness of man to develop the wisdom of God.

"Thou son of Zippor," that is, as we may venture to interpret it, 'thou son of a sovereign who would not have dared thus to rise up in opposition against the living God.' It is clear to me that a contrast was intended by the seer to be presented to the son's mind, in order to reflect upon his conscience his presumed moral inferiority; and if this was really so, Balaam has undoubtedly exhibited consummate skill in conveying so delicate but effective a reproach. Of Zippor, indeed, little appears to be known; but, according to the signification of his name, so emphatically pronounced by Balaam upon this occasion, and which means *crown*, or *desert*, we may fairly assume that he was a

prince of higher moral endowments than his son, who, in defiance of the divine favour not only so openly expressed but so signally exhibited towards the seed of Abraham, persevered in his wicked intention of destroying them by the enchantments of a true though degenerate prophet of God. There could have been nothing criminal in Balak seeking to overcome the enemies of his country in open warfare, nay, he could not have been blamed for availing himself of any practicable resource of the art of war to have contravened the designs of the Israelites upon his territories; the attempt, however, to destroy them by vile sorceries, which he sought to do, was not only cowardly, but in the highest degree wicked.

From the manner in which Zippor's name is alluded to by Balaam, I should take him to have been a sovereign whose life was passed without any great reproach, perhaps with general respect among the nations of Canaan. It is more than possible that he might have been acquainted with the patriarchal worship, with which many pious gentiles were familiar, as I have shown in a former chapter; and although this can only be a presumed fact, nevertheless, we may be in some degree justified, from the interpretation of his name, in assuming that the father was most probably a *good* man, although we cannot fail to be satisfied, from the history before us, that the son was certainly a *bad* one. Supposing then Zippor to have realized, in his own character, the signification of his name, and no reason can be assigned why we should not, this

will add not only great beauty, but likewise great force to the last parallel of the couplet to which the reader's attention has been just directed.

Let us now proceed to what follows, which is no less poetical than the passage that precedes it, as I trust will be presently seen :—

God is not a man that he should lie,
Neither the son of man that he should repent.

The usual duplication of phrase is likewise present in this distich, though not quite so evidently as in some other passages which we have already commented upon; it is however sufficiently definite to be distinguished by the most careless observer, notwithstanding that there is some little variation of the terms, which serves to enhance their poetical effect. The parallel portions of each verse, though so nearly synonymous, are nevertheless not mere useless repetitions, but exhibit delicacies of colouring, in connection with the context, which none but a true poet could have employed, and for consummate art in adapting the artificial to the sublime, they are unrivalled. The words generate ideas which they do not express, and it is surprising how much is heaped upon the mind by the happy disposition of the phrases, and from the consequent suggestions to thought which they throw out. This is in part produced by the happy contrasts in the predominant subjects "God" and "man," and their corresponding predicates, "lie" and "repent;" by these latter the perfections of the one and the weaknesses of the other are brought to mind with a force direct and irresistible. How

beautifully are the attributes of God proclaimed by the negatives employed, and in proportion as those attributes are displayed, the impotency of man becomes conspicuous; each strengthens the other by the mere force of opposition.

The mighty Jehovah, to whom Balaam had now openly appealed for the consummation of a wicked purpose, is exquisitely characterized by that highly endowed, but unrighteous man. He represents him as nothing less than God, perfect and immutable;—not as a being of passions and infirmities, of shifting purposes and accommodating motives, of weak emotions, and placable but infirm benevolence, of a tenderness to be shaken by the selfish cries of impenitent suffering or of interested supplication, interested only in harvesting the treasures of this world;—no! the God whom the seer of Mesopotamia represents, who is the God, not of Israel alone, but of all mankind, is precisely such as the Deity has declared himself to be—"I am that I am"—a Being inscrutable and eternal, incomprehensible, full of mystery, might, majesty, power, and dominion, for ever and ever. In the first verse of the passage last quoted—

God is not a man that he should lie,

the unfailing truth of Jehovah is declared, and this presupposes several other attributes; among these, his justice and mercy, for he could not be infallible, merciful, and just, without being immutably true. In the second verse—

Neither the son of man that he should repent,

God's unchangeableness is maintained, showing the *character* of his truth, that it is immutable, that it is one of those fixed principles essential to the perfection of the divine mind, to which the possibility of change cannot be applied without offering an indignity to the illimitable majesty of heaven. These confessions respecting the Godhead are made, too, by one who, overpowered by the spiritual influences with which his soul was at that moment pregnant, delivered these solemn and important revelations in opposition to the suggestions of his own wicked will; showing the irresistible power which his immediate communication with the Divinity had in causing the evil of his character to give way for a brief interval before the dominant spirit of good. He boldly declares to Balak, while the prophetic rapture was on him, and which he clearly could not control, the august perfection of that Being whom, from his being a true prophet, we may reasonably assume, he formerly loved to serve. All hope is at once taken from the king of Moab that the Deity will swerve from the unalterable purposes of his providence.

There is a striking contrast drawn, as I have before said, betwixt God and man,—God infallible in will, unchangeable in circumstance, subject to no lapses of purpose or of volition—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:"—man addicted to lying, to vacillation, subject to moral infirmities, and exhibiting every kind of spiritual defalcation. The one is the concentration of all perfection, the other the type of

all weakness, and this is signified with emphatic strength within the compass of two short lines, for consummate truth and everlasting immutability involve infinite perfection, and this sums up the character of the Godhead.

The two corresponding phrases in the parallel verses, namely, "man" and "son of man," form a sort of anticlimax sufficiently definite to impart an elegant turn to the sentiment, the latter expression, son of man—of man, a feeble, imperfect, erring creature—adding greater strength to the notions of weakness, imperfection, and error. Nothing can be more distinct than the manner in which the ideas of perfection and frailty are illustrated in their representatives God and man. "Lie" and "repent" are not equivalent, but cognate or relative terms, each implying, under different aspects of signification, the extreme of moral infirmity. In this respect they bear a near relation to each other. Upon the word repent, as applied to God in the sixth chapter of Genesis, verse 6, Dr. Clarke observes: "All things past, present, and to come, lie open at once to the view of the divine mind; and therefore that he is immutable in his counsels, and cannot repent, is one of the plainest dictates both of natural and revealed religion: (Numbers xxiii. 19; 1 Samuel xv. 29.)" "For he is not a man that he should repent." So that the expressions of God's repenting, grieving, and the like, are only figurative and adapted to our apprehensions; signifying, not any change in God himself, but only a *difference of event* with regard to us. Thus good parents or princes,

without any change in themselves, encourage or discourage their respective children or subjects according as they change their behaviour for the better or for the worse. Thus laws themselves, which can have no affection, nor change of affection, towards one person or another, yet vary their effect, themselves remaining unvaried. So when it is here said, God "repented," "was grieved," &c., the meaning is that he was resolved to alter his conduct; and as men, when they repent of any thing, are sorry for it, and endeavour to undo it, so was the Almighty determined to destroy man whom he had created, and whose change from good to evil brought on these consequences from a God continuing ever the same.* We must remember that it is by way of analogy or comparison only, that the nature and passions of men are ascribed to God.

The intention of Balaam in representing the immutability of the divine determination was, no doubt, to show Balak he was in error in supposing that the Deity, whom he had invoked at the express command of an idolatrous king, would change his mind only because the place of invocation was changed; though it appears that the sovereign was by no means convinced of this, as he tried a third change, still encouraging the expectation of a favourable oracle.

Hath he not said, and shall he not do it?
Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

* See Waterland's Scripture Vindicated, part i. p. 29.

How finely is the everlasting truth of God vindicated in these emphatic interrogations! Can God want the power to do what he has said, when the impossibility of his uttering a lie is at once a demonstrative proof that the performance of what he has declared must be an infallible consequence of such declaration? As he can neither lie nor repent, so he cannot refrain from doing what he has once pledged himself by his simple word to perform. The consummation of the thing declared to be the divine determination must follow as a moral necessity from that determination, else God's will would be imperfective, and if this were so, it would conduce to endless error.

All these important arguments are suggested in few words to the mind of the gentile monarch; but he seems to have been too completely absorbed by the one black purpose of his soul to heed them. The passage from the exordium of the second prophecy, in which the two interrogations just noted are so emphatically put, is a powerful appeal to the heart of Balak against the worship of his own vain divinities, by showing the God of Israel in the beauty of his holiness, and the immensity of his might. How beautifully does the second parallel term in the latter clause of the distich rise above the former:—

Hath he not said, and shall he not do it?

may perhaps refer to the divine threatenings, and,

Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

to the divine promises; thus signifying, that the Almighty is equally able to execute the one and to fulfil the other. Nothing can well give stronger effect to this eloquent attestation of the Almighty attributes, than its proceeding from the lips of a wicked man, who, notwithstanding his unchecked proclivity to evil, was so powerfully impressed with the infinite perfections of that august Being who had condescended to make him the organ of his revelations, that he could not forbear proclaiming them. Balaam's declaration in favour of the supremacy of Jehovah did not proceed from any inherent principles of veneration, but was made contrary to his principles, for though he feared God, it is manifest that he did not love him;—his fear caused him to proclaim what he did not dare withhold.

The passage now under our particular notice is a happy specimen of gradational parallelism, or as Bishop Jebb, as I have already observed in a former chapter, terms it, cognate parallelism, because the terms employed are not synonymous, but cognate or kindred, that is, of the same character though not precisely of the same equality, bearing a specific relation, but not exactly the like sense. "Said," "spoken," "do it," and "make it good," are the corresponding expressions of this noble couplet. "Said" conveys a simple affirmation, "spoken," a more emphatic declaration. The one has evidently a greater breadth of signification, so to speak, than the other. The distinction may be considered trifling, but it is not so. It cannot fail to be traced by an accurate discernment. It is, moreover, con-

current with the metrical character of the passage; it imparts to it that poetical aspect which it was designed to assume. It derives, from this nicety in the distinction of the parallels, the grace as well as strength of the Ionic column. "Said" and "spoken," as it has been shown, are terms expressing a similar meaning, but with different emphasis; in the second pair of parallel terms, however, the distinction is more evident. "To do" signifies merely to execute, to "make good" implies the complete performance of an act—in short, the full consummation of a purpose. The one expresses the doing of a thing simply, the other, the perfect completion of it. Thus it will appear that the relative phrases in the last line advance in significancy considerably above those of the first, and not only so, but they expand the simple idea into the complex, thus elevating it to the sublime. The interrogative form, employed by the seer of Mesopotamia to designate God's omnipotence, is extremely emphatic. By thus challenging the heathen king to a denial of the almighty power, he the more strongly proclaims it. Nothing can exceed the significant force and unpretending energy of the three couplets already noticed.

Behold I have received commandment to bless,
And he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

Thus ends the exordium of the second prophecy, and no one, I imagine, will gravely venture to deny that it is truly magnificent. It rises in

dignity with every line, closing with a grand acknowledgment of divine power and of human impotency. However contrary to his own interests, the man Balaam, an illustrious adept in the practice of magical arts, cannot traverse the purposes of the Most High, though he would willingly reverse them: they will be effectuated in spite of the desires of earthly monarchs, of unholy sacrifices, and interdicted sorceries. It is not, indeed, declared in holy writ that the bard of Pethor resorted, upon this occasion, to those practices of incantation and sorcery with which he was reputed to be familiar; but there can be little doubt that Balak expected he would do so; for that he held him to be an enchanter, and a very eminent one too, is clear from his deputing an embassy of nobles to wait on him and solicit his presence at the Moabitish capital, expressly to do what enchanters only were supposed capable of performing.

In the concluding lines of the exordium to his second prediction, Balaam, as Bishop Patrick justly observes, "applies the general proposition in the foregoing verse to this particular case: God hath ordered me to pronounce a blessing upon Israel, and I can neither reverse that blessing nor go against his order." He thus prepares the king of Moab for the unwelcome oracle which he is about to deliver, notwithstanding the probability that it will completely mar his prospects of reward promised by that pusillanimous prince, and which the prophet well knows will fill him with disappointment and bitter vexa-

tion. There is, however, no alternative—the divine will has been solemnly consulted, and in disregard, therefore, of all personal consequences, the prophet must fulfil his mission. He declares, with a tone of melancholy disappointment—

Behold I have received commandment to bless,
And he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Balaam's second prophecy, continued.

THE prophecy now follows which Balak so anxiously expected to hear:—

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob,
Neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel :
The Lord his God is with him,
And the shout of a king is among them.

The whole of this passage is generally held by commentators to be encumbered with difficulties, though, as it appears to me, these are not of such a nature as altogether to defy elucidation; they are difficulties rather arising from peculiarity of idiom than from any actual obscurity or embarrassment in the sense.

Before I proceed, I think it will not be out of place here to vindicate the obscurity of some portions of the sacred writings from objections so often made to them, by an extract or two from the first of Bishop Atterbury's sermons upon this important subject: "The plain account of this matter is," says that eloquent prelate,* "that though the Scripture was written by men, under the immediate inspiration and

* See his First Sermon on the Difficult Passages of Scripture Vindicated, &c.

guidance of the Holy Ghost, yet were those men at the time of this inspiration, left to the free use of their own natural faculties and powers; and to express themselves every one after their peculiar fashion and manner. The Holy Ghost, though it presided over the minds and pens of the apostles so far as to preserve them from error, yet doth not seem to have dictated to them what they were to say word by word, but in that to have left them in a good measure, if not altogether, to themselves. Which appears plainly from hence, in that we find the several writers of the New Testament, always in their several proper and peculiar characters, and almost as different in their styles as one human author is from another."

Now this argument, though exclusively applied by Bishop Atterbury to the writers of the New Testament, will, with equal pertinency and truth, apply to those of the Old.

"For what is left to men to express," continues the same eminent writer, "placed only under an overruling power, which necessitates them to speak nothing but truth, must needs be expressed, though always truly, yet after the unequal, imperfect manner of men, sometimes more darkly and sometimes more clearly. I say, therefore, that the apostles and evangelists, making use of their natural faculties and ways of speech, in committing to writing the truths delivered to them, it could not be expected that they should speak always with the same degree of perspicuity, because no writer does so.

"Further, the nature of some things they delivered was such, so high and heavenly, so obscure and altogether unknown to men, that the language of men could not but fail under them. When they were to express them, they were of necessity sometimes to fall short in what they said, of what they imagined and conceived; and, for want of fit and adequate terms, to clothe their thoughts in unequal and improper ones."

"The eastern manner of thinking and speaking, at that time especially when the Scripture was written, was widely different from ours, who live in this age and in this quarter of the world. The language of the east speaks of nothing simply, but in the boldest and most lofty figures, and in the longest and most strained allegories. Its transitions from one thing to another are irregular and sudden, without the least notice given. Its manner of expressing things is wonderfully short and comprehensive, so as to leave much more to be understood than is plainly and directly spoken. And this also cannot but contribute to make the holy writings seem, in some parts of them, obscure to such as are used to throw their thoughts and their words into quite a different mould.

"Beyond all this, we, at this distance of time, cannot be exactly acquainted with the occasions upon which some parts of Scripture were written: which nevertheless are the true and proper keys that open the meaning of them. We see not the frequent allusions to customs then known and in use. We are in the dark to many

of the objections made to the apostles' doctrine, which are tacitly obviated and answered by them in their epistles, without being mentioned. Under these and many other disadvantages the Holy Scriptures must needs lie, with regard to the obviousness of their sense and meaning, to us, at this distance; it can therefore be no blemish to them, if that meaning be not always obvious."

The obscurity of certain parts of Scripture, "carries no reflection upon the divine goodness or wisdom,—for the goodness of God is by no means obliged to do every thing for us that is possible to be done, but only that which is fitting and sufficient in order to the end it designs. Now the end proposed by God in causing the Scripture to be written, is to afford us a complete rule and measure of whatever is to be believed or done by us. If therefore, in all points of faith and practice, Scripture is sufficiently plain and clear, it is as plain and clear as it need to be; and it can be no reflection on the divine goodness not to have made it plainer.

"The darkness of Scripture in some particular places does not hinder its being generally plain and clear. Its having some things in it hard to be understood, implies that it has but some, and that most things in it are easy to be understood, and lie open and level to the meanest understandings. The truth is, whatever difficulties there are in Scripture, they are few and little in comparison of what is plain and intelligible there. And if, in general, Scripture be perspicuous and clear, we have reason to think there is enough of it clear to instruct us in the whole

of our duty, and make us sufficiently wise unto salvation."

In accounting for the difficulties of Scripture, Bishop Atterbury says, "God left them also to exercise our industry and to engage our attention. He designed the holy book to be such as that we might make it always our companion and our study; that our delight might continually be, as David's was, 'in the law of the Lord,' and in that we might 'meditate day and night;'* in order to which, it was requisite that the sense of everything, everywhere, should not be too plain and obvious; for how then could we have found always fresh matter for our thoughts and inquiries? No! the treasure of divine knowledge was necessarily so to be hid, in those sacred volumes, as not soon to be exhausted, so as continually to provoke our searches, and to feed our minds with ever-fresh discoveries; so as that, how longsoever we meditate upon it, we may have still room left for further meditations. Were all plain, were all open there, the mind would quickly droop, and the attention languish, upon the repeated views of that which it was so well acquainted with, and knew so thoroughly.

"Again, God mixed together obscure with plain things, deep with common truths in Scripture, that what was addressed to all might be adapted to every one's capacity. The babes in Christ as well as grown saints, the weak, promiscuously, and the strong, were to read the Holy Scriptures; and therefore fit it was that there

* Psalm i. 2.

should be food in it proportioned to both, milk for the one and strong meat for the other.

“ Finally, God left these obscurities in Holy Writ, on purpose to give us a taste and glimpse, as it were, of those great and glorious truths which shall hereafter fully be discovered to us in another world, but which are now, in some measure, ‘ hidden from our eyes,’ on purpose to make us earnestly aspire after, and long for, that blessed state and time when all doubts shall be cleared, and the veil taken off from all mysteries; when the book that is now in some measure shut shall be opened, and every one ‘ of the seven seals thereof loosed’ *—‘ when that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away.’ † When we shall exchange faith for sight, hope for enjoyment, reasoning for intuition; and shall not, as we now do, ‘ see through a glass darkly, but know even as we are known.’ ” ‡

Many other reasons might be given in addition to those of the learned divine just quoted, why the inspired oracles are occasionally obscure, as may be seen in a former chapter. § It frequently happens that in the Hebrew writings a thing seems to be stated abstractedly when it is really only so stated with relation to something else. This especially is the case with the first distich following the exordium of Balaam’s second prophecy. It has been said that the rendering, in our common version of the Bible, cannot be right, because God must have beheld

* Rev. v. 5. † 1 Cor. xiii. 10. ‡ Ibid. verse 12. § Chapter 5.

great iniquity and perverseness among the Israelites, whom, on account of their manifold disorders, he was continually visiting with severe punishments, among which need only be mentioned the destruction by earthquake and plague, in consequence of Corah's conspiracy,* and the visitation of fiery serpents,† in both of which instances, a large number of persons miserably perished. But surely the words against which exception has been taken may be understood in a relative sense merely, a thing very common, not only in the Hebrew writings, but in those of all countries and of all times, their literal interpretation being opposed by a moral impossibility, and therefore to signify simply that the posterity of Jacob were neither so wicked nor so perverse as that their divine protector, who had miraculously delivered them from the armies of Pharaoh, should abandon them to the unholy maledictions of an idolatrous king who despised the living God, and by comparison with whom and the nation over which he exercised dominion, the Israelites were righteous and obedient. We should never fail to bear in mind that the style of all oriental writing is in the strongest degree hyperbolical. This is its invariable character; we cannot, therefore, give a literal interpretation to that which was never intended to be so interpreted. Definite terms are frequently employed to express indefinite qualities, as is the case in the verse before us, in which the Israelites are stated to be without

* Numbers xvi.

† Ibid. xxi.

iniquity and perverseness, when it is manifest they were justly chargeable with both, though by comparison with those to whom they were opposed, they might be very properly said to be free from either.

To that passage in the thirty-seventh psalm, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace,"* a similar argument may be applied. The ideas of perfection and uprightness suggested by the psalmist, having relation to an imperfect and erring being, must be received under certain limitations, such a man as is here mentioned being no further perfect and upright than by comparison with the mass of erring creatures, among whom he indeed is one, but whose moral infirmities are so much greater than his. I conceive, then, that the terms applied by Balaam to the Israelites, expressing their freedom from iniquity and perverseness, are simply comparative, because it is clear that they could not be applied with truth to any mere man, much less to any race of men. Literally they were false, comparatively they were true; they must consequently be taken in that sense only in which they are true. All such expressions are to be admitted under a certain latitude of interpretation, and with reference to the prodigious profligacy of the Moabites, they were no doubt employed by the bard of Pethor to signalize the superior, not the perfect, goodness of the Israel-

* Verse 37.

ites, for in comparison with the posterity of Moab, they were pre-eminently righteous.

"It is weakly inferred, from these words," observes Bishop Kidder, "that God sees no sin in his own people; and it is in itself a great untruth. That he hath not knowledge of their sins, no man can affirm: nor ought any man to say, that he approves or will not punish them. For, first, God hath declared otherwise. He said unto Moses, 'I have seen this people, and, behold it is a stiff-necked people;'* and, by the prophet, he said unto the whole family of Israel, whom he brought out of Egypt: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'† Secondly, this cannot be the sense of these words; for then Balaam would in vain have given counsel to draw the Israelites into sin, that they might be destroyed; of which see an account, Numbers xxv., and compare chapter xxxi. 16. The true sense of these words is, that God would not give up the Israelites to destruction for their sins, which were not like the sins of the neighbouring countries, that were now ready to be destroyed for them. 'He hath not beheld,' may be rendered in the present tense, *he doth not behold*, and 'neither hath he seen,' *neither doth he see*. The word which we render 'iniquity,' is observed to signify *an idol* in other places (see 1 Samuel xv. 23; Isaiah lxvi. 3.) The ancients understood it of idolatry: and our church

* Exodus xxxii. 9.; Deut. ix. 13, 14.

† Amos. iii. 2.

understands this place in the same sense, as appears from the homily against the peril of idolatry; "there was no idol in Jacob, nor was there any image seen in Israel; and the Lord God was with the people."

This interpretation at once gets rid of any difficulty which the passage may present, but I think there is no occasion to force the words out of their common and natural acceptance. They may be thus paraphrased :—' God has not seen in the descendants of Israel such flagrant wickedness as to induce him, in obedience with the king of Moab's desire, to visit them with his curse, being determined to bring them into that land of settlement which he had promised to their forefather Abraham.'

The words "iniquity" and "perverseness," in the lines under examination, follow in a natural climax, exhibiting the gradational parallelism, the latter term implying the excess of wickedness, the most atrocious delinquency—a pertinacious adherence to the abominations of idolatry, from which the posterity of Jacob, as a community, was free, as well as from the sins which idolatry superinduces; namely, blasphemy, infidelity, and perpetual rebellion against God. Although by no means a perfect race in the observance either of their moral or religious obligations, they were, nevertheless, worshippers of the true God, and followed the precepts of that religion which he sanctioned and in fact had promulgated.

The terms "iniquity" and "perverseness," must, as I have said, be understood with certain

limitations. Generally the Israelites were neither impious nor idolatrous ; they had not been guilty of those sins in the mass, to which the heathen were so prone, though, individually, they often undoubtedly had. As a nation they had not become involved in those blind and revolting superstitions to which the tribes of Canaan were so notoriously addicted. In the corresponding expressions of the parallel lines, " iniquity " and " perverseness," there will be observed a marked advance of force in the latter word over the former, the one signifying simply wickedness in its general sense, the other, not only the immediate guilt of iniquity, but likewise the determination to persist in incurring it. A man may be thoughtlessly wicked, and yet give some hope of reformation, but the *perversely* wicked is in a far more lamentable state of spiritual defalcation. In him the chances of reformation are much more remote and uncertain.

The shout of a king is among them.

This alludes, as Bishop Patrick states, " to the shouts made when a king returns victorious with the spoils of his vanquished enemies." According to this interpretation, it is a clear prediction of the conquests which the seed of Jacob should obtain over the idolatrous Canaanites ; and such a significant image of triumph, implying, as it did, the most signal success of his foes, must have grated harshly upon the ears of the Moabitish king. The meaning of the passage—

The Lord his God is with him,
And the shout of a king is among them —

will therefore be: 'The Israelites, being under the special protection of Providence, shall obtain signal advantages over their enemies in a succession of glorious victories.' The last line of the distich contains a fine thought. It at once conveys a grand and animated picture of triumphant acclamation.

Some commentators, among whom may be numbered Le Clerc and Dr. Waterland, understand this line to signify, in combination with the foregoing, that the seed of Abraham are under the immediate protection of Jehovah, their especial king and governor. In the phrase, "the shout of a king," they imagine there is a direct reference to the theocracy. I conceive this, however, to be a forced interpretation; and not only does it much abate the dignified simplicity of the original, but perplexes it with additional obscurity, for such a sense is by no means readily obvious. It would, I imagine, occur to no reader, being too tortuous an exposition to clear the difficulty in which the passage is universally admitted to be involved. In a poetical point of view, too, so understood, it possesses much less definite beauty than taken in the sense suggested by Patrick, whose interpretation is no less clear than elevated. I cannot help agreeing with Bishop Atterbury,* "that where the interpretation of scripture has any difficulty, this difficulty is often, in good measure, owing to the preposterous endeavours used, by some men, to explain

* See his First Sermon on the Difficult Passages of Scripture Vindicated, &c.

and clear it. The multiplicity of comments written upon scripture, and the variety of all possible senses of any text started by those writers, have been so far from reaching the end aimed at—the dissipating all doubts and difficulties—that they have cast a mist over many places which of themselves were plain and clear, and have rendered some, that were really a little obscure, yet more unintelligible.

“Numberless volumes have been written on scripture in every age almost since it was published; and still the later writers have generally striven to distinguish themselves from the elder, by some new guess, by saying somewhat that hath not been said before. And thus the mind of an honest inquirer is perplexed and confounded, and in the midst of a thousand false meanings, easily loses sight of the true one.”

God brought them out of Egypt;
He hath, as it were, the strength of an unicorn;

This couplet being repeated in the third prophecy with some amplification, I shall defer my more important remarks upon it for the present; meanwhile, I shall content myself with giving, in this place, a very interesting passage from Bruce's travels, upon the reem, or unicorn of scripture. “There are two animals,” says that enterprising and philosophical traveller,* “named frequently in scripture, without naturalists being agreed what they are: the one is behemoth, the other is reem; both mentioned as the types of strength, courage, and independence on

* See his Travels, vol. v. p. 90.

man, and, as such, exempted from the ordinary lot of beasts to be subdued by him, or reduced under his dominion. Though this is not to be taken in a literal sense, for there is no animal without the fear, or beyond the reach, of the power of man, we are to understand this as applicable to animals possessed of strength and size so superlative, as that in those qualities other beasts bear no proportion to them.

“The behemoth, then, I take to be the elephant: his history is well known; and my only business is with the reem, which I suppose to be the rhinoceros. The derivation of this word, both in the Hebrew and Ethiopic, seems to be from erectness or standing straight. This is certainly no particular quality in the animal itself, who is not more, or even so much, erect as many other quadrupeds, for in its knees it is rather crooked; but it is from the circumstance and manner in which his horn is placed. The horns of other animals are inclined to some degree of parallelism with the nose or os frontis. The horn of the rhinoceros alone is erect and perpendicular to this bone, on which it stands at right angles, thereby possessing a greater purchase, or power, as a lever, than any horn could have in any other position.

“This situation of the horn is very happily alluded to in the sacred writings: ‘My horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a unicorn;’ and the horn here alluded to is not wholly figurative, as I have already taken notice of in the course of my history, but was really an ornament worn by great men in the days of victory, pre-

ferment, or rejoicing, when they were anointed with new, sweet, or fresh oil, a circumstance which David joins with that of erecting the horn.

“Some authors, for what reason I know not, have made the reem or unicorn to be of the deer or antelope kind; that is, a genus whose very character is fear and weakness, very opposite to the qualities by which the reem is described in Scripture. Besides, it is plain the reem is not of the class of clean quadrupeds; and a late modern traveller, very whimsically takes him for the leviathan, which certainly was a fish. It is impossible to determine which is the silliest opinion of the two. Balaam, a priest of Midian, and so dwelling in the neighbourhood of the haunts of the rhinoceros, and intimately connected with Ethiopia (for they themselves were shepherds of that country), in a transport from contemplating the strength of Israel, whom he was brought to curse, says, ‘they had, as it were, the strength of the reem.’ Job makes frequent allusions to his great strength, and ferocity, and indocility. He asks, ‘Will the reem be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?’ that is, will he willingly come into thy stable and eat at thy manger? And, again, ‘Canst thou bind the reem with a band in the furrow, and will he harrow the valleys after thee?’ In other words, canst thou make him go in the plough or the harrow?”

Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob,
Neither is there any divination against Israel.

In this pair of lines, there is evidently a double

parallelism, both gradational and constructive, although the correspondency between the two most emphatic terms by which the former is defined are not exceedingly close. I have already offered some remarks in a former chapter,* upon the distinction to be observed between Jacob and Israel, and consequently need not repeat them here. Enchantment and divination are words differing widely in signification, nevertheless, they have a relative correspondency of meaning, which sufficiently indicates and preserves the gradational parallelism, at the same time that it does not disturb the constructive parallelism which the couplet manifestly exhibits. The prophet here means to say that no enchantments or magical arts can prevail against the posterity of Jacob, because they are specially under divine protection, he is consequently unable to foretel anything to their prejudice, no divination or prediction against them being permitted by their heavenly guardian. As if he had said, 'Sorcery, being an art not sanctioned by that Almighty Being from whom I have received the gift of prophecy, can produce no effect against those whom he protects, and the power of those evil spirits by whom alone enchantments are effectuated, cannot be exercised against the divine interdiction. I am, therefore, neither permitted to practise any magical arts against the Israelites, nor to predict any evil of them.'

Balaam, in spite of his desire to do the bidding of Balak, appears in this place, contrary to the

suggestions of his own warped will, to burst into a strain of prophetic rapture, proclaiming the omnipotence of that God by whom he had been endowed with such a distinguished spiritual gift as the power of foretelling future events, declaring that all the wicked devices and unbalanced sorceries of the heathen to which he had now so long addicted himself, could bring no adverse issue upon a people supported by that omnipotent arm, against which nothing can prevail—a people whom Jehovah had determined to bless.

The difference between enchantment and divination is great, the one being the exercise of magical arts, the other the prediction of future events, though usually through the invocation of evil spirits, so that the diviner and magician, in ancient times, were generally associated. Of enchantments, Calmet thus speaks: * “It is common in Scripture for magicians, sorcerers, and enchanters, to speak in a low voice, to whisper: they are called *ventriloqui*, because they speak, as one would suppose, from the bottom of their stomachs. They affected secrecy and mysterious ways, to conceal the vanity, folly, or infamy, of their pernicious art. Their pretended magic often consisted in cunning tricks only, in sleight of hand, or some natural secrets unknown to the ignorant. They affected obscurity and night, or would show their skill only before the uninformed or mean persons, and feared nothing so much as serious examination, and the inspection of the intelligent.

* Dictionary of the Bible, art. Enchantments.

“The enchantments of Pharaoh’s magicians, in imitation of the miracles wrought by Moses, were either mere witchcraft and illusion, whereby they deceived the eyes of the spectators; or, if they performed miracles and produced real changes of the rods, of the water of the Nile, &c., they did it by the application of second causes to the production of effects, which depend originally upon the power of God, and by giving certain forms to, or impressing certain motions on, a created substance; and as these changes and motions were above the popularly known powers of nature, they were thought to be miraculous. But God never permits miracles produced by evil spirits to be such as may necessarily seduce us into error, for either he limits their power, as he did to Pharaoh’s magicians, who were obliged to acknowledge the finger of God in some instances; or they discover themselves by their impiety or bad conduct, which are the marks appointed by Moses for discerning a false from a true prophet.”

Of divination, the same learned writer says: “The easterns were always fond of divination, magic, the art of interpreting dreams, and of acquiring the prescience of futurity. When Moses published the law, this disposition had long been common in Egypt and the neighbouring countries. To correct the Israelites’ inclination to consult diviners, wizards, fortune-tellers, and interpreters of dreams, it was forbidden them under very severe penalties, and the true spirit of prophecy was promised to them, as infinitely superior. He commanded those to be

stoned who pretended to have a familiar spirit, or the spirit of divination (Deut. xviii. 9, 10, 15.) The prophets are full of invectives against the Israelites who consulted diviners, and against false prophets, who by such means seduced the people.

“Divination was of several kinds: by water, fire, earth, air; by the flight of birds and their singing; by lots, by dreams, by arrows, &c.

“Divination by the earth, or geomancy, is common among the Persians. They impute the invention of it to Edris (Enoch) or to Daniel. It consists in making several points on a table prepared for this purpose, which they call Raml. These points, disposed in a certain number, on many unequal lines, are likewise described with a pen on paper: he who divines by this art is called Rummal. He derives his pretended knowledge of futurity from the combination of these points and lines.”*

It will be seen from these extracts, that though there was a wide distinction betwixt enchantments and divinations, they, nevertheless, both characterized a dealing in magical arts: so that when Balaam mentions these acquirements of his profession, and declares that neither can prevail against those to whom the inheritance of Canaan had been promised by God, he, no doubt, meant to signify to his royal patron, that those powers which he was in the habit of exercising as a magician could now be of no avail, when God was supplicated, and not subor-

dinate agents whom he did not recognize. The arts of man or of devils were alike unavailing to contravene his immutable purpose, and as he had determined to bless the Israelites, no machinations of sorcery could enable Balaam to curse them.

Here it is at once shown that the true God was no encourager either of enchantments or of evil divinations, as he would not allow them to operate against those whom he had signally and especially chosen as his people. Such practices were manifestly criminal, and therefore could not be sanctioned by a just and holy God, which was soon proved to the grievous disappointment of the sovereign of Moab.

According to this time it shall be said
Of Jacob and of Israel, what hath God wrought ?

That is to say, the time is now come when the Lord Jehovah shall perform many mighty miracles in favour of this people, and these will be so great and numerous as to excite the astonishment of a nation, who shall, with one accord, express their wonder.

The seventy translate the words, " when time shall be," or, " upon all occasions," not only now, but in future ages to the remotest time, men shall relate with admiration what God has, in his great mercy, wrought for this people, in bringing them out of Egypt, in drying up Jordan, as he had previously done the Red Sea, and in subduing the Canaanites, as he had overthrown Pharaoh and his host, the most formidable enemies of his chosen servants.

"If," observes the judicious and learned Patrick,* "there be any difference between Jacob and Israel, the former signifies this people when they were in their low estate, and the latter when they were eminently exalted; in both which God did wonderful things for them that astonished all who observed." In fact, this whole history eminently distinguishes them as the race from which that great deliverer of men, the Messiah, was to spring.

It is clear that those marvellous dispensations manifested by God towards the Israelites, from the period of their deliverance out of Egyptian bondage to that of their final settlement in Canaan, their promised inheritance, have ever been among the great wonders of history. They were known to all nations, so to speak. Even among the gross fables of Hindoo theology, an acknowledgment of these signal displays of the divine mercy may be traced, enveloped, indeed, in the mists of legendary imposture and the extravagant fictions of an intractable superstition, nevertheless, distinctly existing there, though "clouds and darkness" rest upon them. Rivers are deified by the Hindoos, among which the Gunga, or Ganges, is the principal; and I apprehend that their knowledge of the passage of the Red Sea and of the Jordan by the Israelites, led to this strange apotheosis among a people always delighting in the marvellous, and always aiming at the impossible. An extract from one of their sacred books will very curiously show

* See his note.

their faith in the efficacy of those rivers which theirs superstition has rendered divine. "Should any person have eaten with another who is degraded for seven successive births; or have committed the five sins, each of which is called maha pataka; should he have eaten the food which has been touched by an unclean woman; or have constantly spoken falsely; or have stolen gold, jewels, &c.; should he have killed the wife of his friend, or have injured brahmins, or friends, or his mother; or have committed those sins which doom a man to the hell called Maharaurauva; or have committed those sins for which the messengers of Yama constantly beat a person; or have committed multitudes of sins in childhood, youth, and old age; if this person bathe in Gunga at an auspicious period, all these sins will be removed; he will also be admitted into the heaven of Brahma, the Puram-hungsee, he will be put in possession of the merits of the man who presents a lack* of red cows to a brahmin learned in the four Vedas; and afterwards will ascend and dwell at the right hand of Vishnoo. After he has enjoyed all this happiness, and shall be reborn on the earth, he will be possessed of every good quality, enjoy all kinds of happiness, be very honourable, &c. He who shall doubt any part of this, will be doomed to the hell called Coombhee Paka, and afterwards be born an ass. If a person, in the presence of Gunga, on the anniversary of her arrival on the earth, and according to the rules prescribed in the Shastras, present to the brahmins whole

* A hundred thousand.

villages, he will obtain the fruits which arise from all other offerings, from all sacrifices, from visiting all holy places, &c.; his body will be a million times more glorious than the sun; he will obtain a million of virgins, and multitudes of carriages, palankeens, &c., covered with jewels; he will dwell for ages in heaven, enjoying its pleasures, in company with his father; as many particles of dust as are contained in the land thus given away to the brahmins, for so many years will the giver dwell in happiness in Vishnoo's heaven."*

The passage now under examination has been variously interpreted. Waterland reads: "It shall be told in its season to Jacob or to Israel what God shall do." Houbigant gives much the same reading: "In its time it shall be told what the God of Jacob and Israel may do." Bishop Kidder interprets the clause—"the time is now at hand when God shall do great things for Israel." Dr. Adam Clarke reads: "As at this time it shall be told to Jacob and to Israel what God worketh; that is, this people shall always have *prophetic information* of what God is about to work. And indeed they are the only people under heaven who ever had this privilege. When God himself designed to punish them because of their sins, he always *forewarned* them by the prophets; and also took care to apprise them of all the plots of their enemies against them."†

This appears to me more ingenious than

* Ward's View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos, vol. iii. pp. 216, 217.

† See Dr. A. Clarke's note.

satisfactory; it is working more meaning out of the passage than it will really bear. The sense does not follow, so interpreted, from the natural import of the words. Balaam is extolling the moral superiority of the Israelites over the heathen, and the divine mercy towards them in consequence. He proclaims the wonders that God has worked in their behalf in bringing them out of the land of bondage by a miraculous interposition of his providence. He then appeals to the king of Moab whether it is likely that enchantments or divinations, the base resources of magic, can prevail against a people so supported, of whom it shall be said throughout all future time, by all generations and their posterities, 'look what the Lord has done for Israel whom he had chosen.' This appears to me the simplest interpretation, and is sanctioned by Bishop Patrick, one of the most temperate and judicious of commentators.

I think, in the structure of the verses, we shall discover a peculiarity of poetical management. It will be observed that no fact is directly stated, but only inferred, the inference being really stronger than the direct affirmation would have been. In succeeding times people shall exclaim, 'what hath God wrought for Israel!'—not 'his almighty mercy has done so and so for them,' but 'how great and marvellous have been his dispensations!' thus the more greatly magnifying those dispensations by alluding indefinitely to them rather than by stating them in detail. I think this couplet clearly exhibits that poetical *manner* which decidedly distinguishes it from prose.

Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion,
 And lift up himself as a young lion :
 He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey,
 And drink of the blood of the slain.

The comparisons in these lines are very similar to those introduced into the blessings pronounced by Jacob upon Judah (Gen xlix. 8—12), only they are here reversed, the great lion, as it is rendered, preceding the young lion. The word translated great lion, in the first hemistich, as in Jacob's prophecy, signifies a lioness, and represents the determined character of the Israelites in subduing the nations occupying the land promised to them as their future inheritance, against whom they carried on a long but successful war, with that indomitable determination which the lioness, the fiercest of all creatures when her lair is invaded, exhibits in defence of her cubs; the warlike posterity of Jacob rising, like a young but full-grown lion, in all the vigour of its strength and courage, to scatter dismay and death among their affrighted foes.

Although we have not the charm of novelty in these comparisons, we, nevertheless, cannot but feel the propriety of their application. The coincidences of comparison betwixt this prophecy of Balaam and that of Jacob, concerning Judah, are very remarkable, where there can be no ground for supposing that the son of Bosor was acquainted with what had been delivered by the son of Isaac upwards of two hundred years before. The employment of the same images by the two prophetic bards will not seem so strange, when we recollect that

both sought for comparisons among such objects in nature as best represented the characters of those whom it was their province to describe. There is no just reason for supposing that Balaam, great as his genius manifestly was, would have borrowed so openly from a poet inferior to himself, for such undoubtedly was Jacob, though a man pre-eminently endowed, as his prophecies sufficiently attest. It is no common thing to find coincidences of the most striking kind in the compositions of men, writing much under the same circumstances, and seeking their illustrations from the same sources.

It occurs to me that Lord Byron, when he published his two poems, entitled "Cain" and "Heaven and Earth," declared he had not read any of Milton's poetical works since he was twenty years old, and had entirely forgotten them; nevertheless, the most remarkable identities of thought, and almost of expression, are constantly occurring; so much so, that the reader is led to imagine that he had the spirit of Milton continually in his eye, and yet, if he is to be believed on his own recorded assertion, this was not the case. It is still less singular that Balaam should have employed similar images with a previous prophet, when he poured forth the effusions of his bright and gifted genius in embodying the revelations communicated to him from on high. When they both delivered oracles revealed from heaven, and designed for the benefit of mankind, society was in its infant state; men were generally shepherds or agri-

culturists; they, therefore, as a matter of course, that is, those among them who had the genius to submit their thoughts and effusions to the rules of composition, resorted to the book of nature for their illustrations and figurative representations, that of art being now a sealed volume: as an evidence of this we find the same terms employed under the same, or nearly the same condition of things, in all the poetical portions of Scripture, though these are beautifully varied and harmonized according to the peculiar genius of the poet. We discover them continually in the book of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, and in all the prophets, more or less frequent according to the circumstances under which those different compositions were produced.

The comparisons to which I have been referring, as used by Balaam, admirably represent the combined qualities of fierceness and strength, resolution and courage, energy and defiance of danger, qualities signally displayed by the seed of Abraham during the entire progress of their conquests in the land of Canaan, their future inheritance by promise. Their whole journey was marked by striking examples of boldness and enterprise. They carried on a war, if not of actual extermination, at least of general expulsion; for, as they had to conquer the country which they were destined to inherit, they had no chance of maintaining their conquests, except by expelling the people who then had possession of it. Wherever, there-

fore, they conquered, they made settlements, either utterly destroying the inhabitants, or driving them out of their cities and towns.

In their wars before the settlement of Canaan, as we learn from the writings of Moses, the Israelites displayed great courage and constancy; they had frequently to contend against powerful enemies, the armies of Amalek, for instance, and yet they continued, against every natural disadvantage, their career of conquest, until the promised possession was finally secured. They subdued the Midianites. They had likewise overcome Sihon, king of the Amorites, a warlike prince, and Og, the king of Bashan, a prince of gigantic stature and fierce courage; and in the wars under Joshua, they still further signalized that bravery which, in the prophecies of Balaam, it was foretold they should display, and under that leader this second prophecy was eminently fulfilled. It was not, then, without some colour of justice that the descendants of that holy patriarch, who wrestled with an angel at Penuel, should be compared to a lion with respect to their bravery, as they finally became the vanquishers of the most warlike people of those times. It is true God was with them, and his mighty arm scattered dismay among their enemies, but, as all the lofty qualities of the soul are his dispensing, the bravery of their foes, as well as their own, was God's ordaining; they are, therefore, not the less to be admired for that courage, which is invariably the gift of heaven wherever it is manifested.

He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey,

that is, he shall not rest until he has subdued his enemies, like a lion rendered ferocious by hunger, which captures and devours its victims before it lies down to repose. The concluding couplet is exceedingly fine, keeping up the metaphor of the lion to the last, and closing the whole prophecy with a vivid picture of conquest, under the happy illustration of a ravenous beast of prey tearing its victim to pieces and lapping its blood.

The parallelism in the first couplet of this fine passage is very striking, and full of picturesque effect, as we shall see :—

Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion (lioness),
And lift up himself as a young lion.

Here is a marked gradation from fierceness to strength, indicated by the indomitable ferocity of the nursing lioness and the vigorous energy of the young lion, full of might and unsubduable resolution. See how the picture is heightened by the parallel expressions, which are exquisitely varied, “rise up” and “lift up himself.” We at once imagine the lioness in her quiescent state, placidly suckling her young, suddenly roused to fury by some presumptuous intruder or daring assailant. Erecting her fur, raising her head, exposing her formidable fangs, she rises from her lair, roars hideously, and stands before her foe, a type of fierce determination and unconquerable ferocity. Then the full-grown lion, in the tremendous plenitude of his peculiar instincts and courage, being roused from his slumbers, “lifts up himself” from the hard bed of

his repose, shakes his mane, tosses his head, and waves his tail, his dilated eye beaming with the fire of conscious strength and physical superiority over the brutes of the forest. He bounds forward into the thickets, which echo his portentous roar, and their timid inhabitants flee at this dreaded signal of his approach. Can anything be stronger than these images? Can anything more eloquently or more exactly characterize the progress of the Israelites in their proud career of conquest, as Moses had prophetically said in his song of triumph:

The people shall hear and be afraid;
Sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.
All the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away;
Fear and dread shall fall upon them.*

This was to the letter realized by the valour of Abraham's posterity; thus were the comparisons used by the bard of Mesopotamia abundantly justified by the event. It is remarkable that the two last verses of Balaam's second prediction, as presented in our common Bible version, and this, too, evidently without any design of the translators, possesses a rhythm as perfect as if the line had been regularly scanned according to the strictest rules of prosody. Let us observe:—

He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey,
And drink of the blood of the slain.

By subjecting the word until, as it is employed by our translators, to its common elision, this distich will be made to comprise a pair of legi-

* Exodus xv. 14—16.

timate verses, which will precisely correspond with the following couplet from Cowper's well-known poem of the Rose, remarkable alike for its simplicity and pathos. I quote from the last verse but one:—

And such, | I exclaimed, | is the pit | ~~ileas~~ part
Some act | by the del | icate mind.

In the former of these lines it will be seen that there are four feet; the first of two syllables, the second, third, and fourth, each of three. The second line consists of three feet, the first of two syllables, the two remainder of three each. The concluding couplet of the prophecy, which has now so largely occupied the reader's attention, may be scanned exactly after the same form, by substituting the elliptical word *till* for *until*, a deviation, if one at all, so trifling from the original text as scarcely to deserve mention. The first foot in each line is an iambus, containing a short and long syllable; all the remainder are anapæsts, containing two short syllables and one long:—

He shall | not lie down | till he eat | of the prey,
And drink | of the blood | of the slain.

There can, I think, be little doubt, from this singular instance, that the learned body who united their labours for the formation of our authorized version of the Bible, though professedly giving a prose translation, were unconsciously led into this rhythmical distribution of the phrases by the metrical form of the original.

With reference to the presence of metre in

the Hebrew poetry, I may mention here what I neglected to state in its proper place, when examining Bishop Jebb's arguments against its employment in the Holy Scriptures. To my mind, the existence of the synthetic or constructive parallelism, which he admits, is an absolute proof of the presence of metre. What is the epic or heroic verse of ten syllables but a series of constructive parallelisms? and it is those very metrical laws to which they are subjected which renders them so. The same may be said of all the corresponding lines of every description of verse; wherever these corresponding lines occur they form perfect constructive parallelisms, and these are never found in any kind of prose; so that where they occur in the sacred writings, they afford, as I conceive, the strongest possible presumptive proof of the existence of Hebrew verse; for it is the peculiar province of verse to create those parallelisms. The other forms of parallelism, though not so clearly exhibiting the presence of metre, are, nevertheless, strong indications of it, especially as the one form so strongly establishes it.

I shall now give Herder's version of this prophecy, which, to say the least of it, is perspicuous and elegant.

Stand up, O Balak, and hear,
 Harken to me, thou son of Zippor.
 God is not a man that he should lie;
 Nor the son of man that he should repent.
 Hath he said, and shall he not do it?
 Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?
 Behold I have received a blessing,
 He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

No evil is to be seen upon Jacob,
 No misfortune impends over Israel.
 Jehovah his God is with him,
 The shout of a king in his midst.
 God hath brought him out of Egypt,
 Like a wild bullock in his strength.
 No enchantment prevails against Jacob,
 Nor any divination against Israel.
 According to the times it shall be told him
 What God hath resolved to be done.
 Behold this people, they rise up as a lion,
 And lift themselves up as a young lion.
 He lieth not down, till he eat the prey,
 And drink the blood of the slain.

This differs materially from our Bible rendering, only in the fifth, seventh, and ninth couplets; but as I have already dilated at some length upon those passages,* it is not necessary that I should say anything further in this place. I shall now conclude this chapter with a brief exposition of the whole prophecy after the exordium.

‘Those enemies whom you have summoned me to curse, are under the especial protection of Jehovah, who can “bind even kings in chains, and nobles with links of iron.” They are not, like the Moabites, addicted to idolatry and impiety in their lowest excess; God, therefore, is with them, their protector, ruler, and guide, and will cause them to be victorious over their enemies, who must yield to them the supremacy of Canaan. The shouts of their triumphant armies shall be heard with consternation by their defeated foes. They shall assume sovereign dominion. The same God who brought them out of Egypt with a mighty arm, dividing the

* See pp. 467, 474, 481.

Red Sea and overwhelming the armies of Pharaoh;—who led them through the wilderness, performing numerous miracles on their behalf; and who, to compare infinite with finite, possesses incalculably greater strength and power over man than the most colossal and fiercest quadrupeds over the feeblest brutes of the forest;—that God whom they serve faithfully, by whom they have been especially chosen as his people, and by whom, likewise, I am now endowed with the gift of prophecy, being their protector, how shall my feeble enchantments, and my ordinary divinations, neither sanctioned by him, any more than the revelations which he has made to me, operate against them. The all-wise dispensations in their favour shall be the marvel and admiration of all ages. Behold, king of Moab, this shall come to pass. As a lion, which is the terror of the forest, scatters dismay and death among the inferior animals, so shall the Israelites spread consternation among the nations of Canaan. They shall rise up in the vigour of their irresistible might, and make the inhabitants of Palestina tremble before them. As the lioness, the fiercest of the brute creation, does not lie down to slumber until she and her cubs have devoured their prey, so neither shall the sons of Israel rest from the toils of war until they have exterminated their enemies, and secured quiet possession of the land promised to their forefathers for a perpetual inheritance.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Balak's disappointment. The highest mountains supposed by the Canaanites to be under the dominion of certain divinities. Balak's reliance upon their interference. Revolting rites performed in their groves, and upon their hill-altars. Seven a sacred number among the Hebrews. Sacrifices to the seven planets. Balaam's apology to Balak for his failure.

WHEN Balaam had delivered his second prophecy, the king of Moab, disappointed at his expectations being again defeated, desired that if the prophet did not curse his enemies, he would at least refrain from blessing them. Balaam reminded him of what he had said before he attempted to perform the requisition of this pusillanimous monarch, that he could only do on this or any similar occasion, what the Lord should permit, and that, therefore, it would be unreasonable to blame him, should the issue prove unfavourable. Balak, however, still hoping that his desire might be accomplished, conducted Balaam to the summit of mount Peor, supposed to be the peak upon which the celebrated temple, dedicated to Baal-Peor, was erected, and in which the most abominable rites were performed.

Dodd's note upon the words, " I will bring thee unto another place," Numbers xxiii. 27, is well worth introducing here. " As the Syrians imagined that some gods were powerful on the hills who could do nothing in the plains,* so it seems there was such a conceit at this time in these countries, that some gods had more power on one hill than another. The idea of local deities was very general. Thus Balak might imagine that his god had hitherto been withheld by the God of Israel from granting his desire, but might be more powerful in another place. Low as were the conceptions of those idolaters respecting their deities, do we not see the same still prevail in the Romish church, where much more virtue is attributed to some images of the blessed Virgin than to others? for which reason devotees flock in greater numbers to the places where such images are found?" Peor, the hill to which Balaam was conducted by Balak, after the latter's two disappointments, is supposed to have been one of the peaks of Abarim, near to which were Nebo and Pisgah. Upon this mountain it is conjectured that there was a celebrated temple, dedicated to Baal-Peor, the idol of turpitude, as he is designated by Origen. Father Simon imagines that this hill was called after that obscene idol, as the heathens had their Jupiter Olympius, Apollo Clarius, Mercurius Cyllenius, &c., names derived from the places where their temples stood. Maius and Cocceius† think it imports a naked height, or, as we say, an *open* pros-

* See 1 Kings xx. 23, 28.

† Lex. p. 100.

pect, or a mountain free from impediments; —that which stands unsheltered, plainly to be seen; the *vertex* of a high hill. It was the name of a mountain standing very favourably for a distant prospect; “a prospect station in an *open* place” (Numbers xxiii. 28.)

The highest mountains were imagined by the Canaanites generally to be under the exclusive dominion of certain divinities, who there exercised an uncontrolled power; among these Baal-Peor is supposed to have held the pre-eminence, especially by the Moabites and Midianites. Under the impression of such a belief, Balak hoped that although the seer of Mesopotamia had been unsuccessful in two instances, the presiding divinity of Peor might, nevertheless, be more propitious. For this reason, the prophet was conducted to the summit of that hill, whence he could behold the vast array of the Israelitish army encamped upon the plain beneath. The temples dedicated to the heathen deities were mostly erected upon the tops of mountains. Being thus remote from the habitations of men, and, therefore, not places of general concourse, they became not only scenes of the grossest idolatries, but likewise of the most revolting licentiousness; and were consequently destroyed by the zeal of Hezekiah and other pious princes. Of the nature of the obscene rites performed in those unhallowed fanes, a tolerably correct idea may be formed by the abominations practised at this day in the Hindoo pagodas. Nothing can exceed the obscenity daily witnessed within the penetralia of those

profaned sanctuaries. There is a famous temple at Tirupati, in the Carnatic, which sterile women frequent in crowds to obtain children from the god Vencata Ramana, who presides over this abominable pest-house of idolatry. Here, on their arrival, the unhappy dupes of their own weak credulity immediately apply to the brahmins, to whom they disclose the object of their pilgrimage. Those hoary, or rather bald priests, for their crowns are shaved, tell the deluded suppliants at the shrine of a most bestial superstition that they must pass the night in the temple, and expect with a holy reliance the visitation of its presiding divinity. During the solemn silence and profound darkness of night, the brahmins visit the beguiled votaries, and in due time disappear. In the morning, having made the necessary inquiries, they congratulate their besotted victims upon the benignant reception they have met with from the all-powerful Vencata Ramana ; and then, receiving from them rich offerings for the shrine of that unconscious divinity, dismiss them with the strongest assurances that the object of their pious pilgrimage will shortly be accomplished. The women, strong in faith, return to their husbands, who have sanctioned their visit to this polluted temple, fully assured that they have had intercourse with its god, who has vouchsafed to remove from them the curse of barrenness, to a Hindoo woman the greatest imaginable evil of the human condition.* There are many other rites

* See Dubois' Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India, pp. 410, 411.

exhibited in Hindoo pagodas, so atrociously obscene that they could not be recorded in print without startling even the most depraved mind; but if what has been stated by learned men of the rites peculiar to the temple of Baal-Peor be true, they, if possible, exceeded in horrible bestiality those to which I have alluded.

When Balak and Balaam reached the summit of Peor, the altars were erected as before, and the holocausts repeated. Although, however, these three septenary sacrifices are stated to have followed each other, without any space of time being mentioned as having elapsed between them, we are not to suppose that they actually took place on the same day. There was, in all probability, an interval of at least one day allowed to intervene betwixt each of the three septenary offerings, as the distance of the hills from the city, the difficulty of ascent, the actual immolation of the victims, must have occupied, in each case, many hours; though, for the sake of brevity in the narrative, the events are mentioned as following each other in immediate succession, the historian feeling that there was no necessity to enter into details apart from the immediate facts of the history, these being the only essential matters which it was necessary to record. It is clear that if Moses had given a copious statement of all those events of which his narrative supplies only a summary account, the portion of Scripture contributed by him would have swelled into as many volumes as it now contains sections, and thus really have precluded the general reading of Holy Writ; such a

vast mass of minute historical detail would have repelled even many of the truly pious from undertaking so gigantic a task. That inspired and holy man, therefore, has only dealt with main and important facts in his history, omitting nothing that was essential to be recorded; at the same time stating nothing but what was positively indispensable for securing the great object of revelation, the information of man upon those matters which alone can make him wise unto salvation.

It will be observed that Moses is very particular in mentioning the repetitions of the sacrifices commanded by Balaam upon each of the three mountains, as this was clearly a very important feature of the several transactions here recorded.

“According to the account which both Festus and Servius give of ancient times, the heathens sacrificed to the celestial gods only upon altars; to the terrestrial they sacrificed upon the earth; and to the infernal, in holes dug in the ground. And though the number seven was much observed among the Hebrews, even by God’s own appointment (Leviticus iv. 6), yet we do not read of more than one altar built by the patriarchs when they offered their sacrifices; nor were any more than one allowed by Moses. We may, therefore, well suppose, that there was something of heathen superstition in this erection of seven altars; and that the Moabites, in their worship of the sun, principally meant in Scripture by the term Baal, did at the same time sacrifice to the seven planets. This was originally a

part of the Egyptian theology; for as at this time they worshipped the lights of heaven, so they first imagined the seven days of the week to be under the respective influence of these seven luminaries. Belus and his Egyptian priests having obtained leave to settle in Babylon, about half a century before this time, might teach the Chaldeans their astronomy, and so introduced this Egyptian notion of the influence of the seven ruling stars, which Balaam, being no stranger to the learning of the age and country in which he lived, might pretend to Balak to proceed upon, in his divinations and auguries." (Le Clerc's commentary ad locum, and Shuckford's Connection, vol. iii. book 12.)*

After the sacrifice of the seven bullocks and seven rams had been offered upon the top of Peor, according to the prophet's direction, the sacred writer says, "when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face towards the wilderness." Now, as there is nothing in the narrative which positively justifies the conclusion that enchantments, in the ordinary sense of the term, had been employed by Balaam on the two former occasions, when he retired from the altars of burnt-offering to meet the Lord, it is reasonable to infer that the word enchantments in this passage has a different meaning from the common acceptation in which it is understood: es-

* See Stackhouse's note, History of the Bible, vol. i. pp. 482, 483; folio edit. 1742.

pecially as such a sense does not agree with the narrative ; for, in the two former instances mentioned of the prophet's communion with God on the high places of Baal, and on mount Pisgah, he did not seek for enchantments but for divinations—that is, to be informed of the Deity's intention concerning Israel. The meaning, then, in this place, I take to be, that the bard of Pethor did not seek for divinations, as on the two previous occasions, when he retired to receive the divine oracle ; but was determined to perform the king of Moab's command, without consulting God. He was prepared to curse the Israelites at all hazards, hoping that, if he did not voluntarily seek the Lord, to consummate his unholy purpose, no impediment would be raised ; for we cannot be mistaken in his desire from the first, which was to execrate that people which the Deity had especially visited with his blessing. His wicked design, however, was baffled by the celestial interposition, since, notwithstanding his criminal purpose, the spirit of God came upon him.

The word translated enchantments, may, according to Houbigant, be rendered auguries, or the power of fore knowledge ; so that Balaam, finding the faculty communicated to him by the Divinity, when he consulted him concerning Israel, of foretelling the future destiny of that distinguished people, represented nothing but prosperity to them, he was anxious to try if he might not be allowed to imprecate a malediction upon them, without soliciting that aid which had hitherto contravened both his and Balak's expecta-

tions. We cannot be mistaken as to his feelings towards the Israelites; for although he pronounced upon them blessings instead of curses, that he detested them is proved, from the melancholy disasters in which they were subsequently involved by the wicked advice which the unrighteous prophet gave to Balak respecting them. In consequence of this, they were seduced to form criminal alliances with the women of Midian, to the posterity of Jacob the cause of much misery and mischief. That Balaam would have cursed them had he dared there can be no doubt; that he did not, only enhances the truth of his reluctant prophecies. Bishop Patrick is of opinion that the word enchantments, in this place implies that Balaam had hitherto, in the process of the wicked business in which he was engaged by Balak, really employed magical arts to effect his purpose; but finding them unavailing to the fulfilment of his designs, he abandoned himself wholly to the direction of God's Holy Spirit, and offered no further to seek for enchantments. I do not, however, think that this view is justified by the context. Balaam must have been aware that those arts which appeal to the agency of evil spirits could not have been acceptable to a just and holy God, with whose character he was clearly well acquainted. We can scarcely imagine that God would have "met Balaam," and have "put a word into his mouth," whilst he was in the very act of offering a grievous insult to his most sacred majesty. I, therefore, take the word enchantments here to have a

limited sense,—namely, that he did not, as he had previously done, repair to a retired spot to seek the Lord and receive his oracles, which might have been preceded, on Balaam's part, by certain forms of supplication, probably of no efficacy, still mysteriously used by seers or men supposed to be inspired; but that he was prepared to deliver his auguries or divinations without any further specific appeal to supernatural assistances.

Josephus, who frequently amplifies the Mosaic history, represents Balaam as making an apology, in order to pacify Balak's anger at his having twice blessed the Israelites, instead of cursing them:* “And does king Balak suppose, that, where prophets are dealing with the subject of fatalities, or future events, they are left to their own choice what to say? We are only the passive instruments of the oracle. The words are put into our mouths, and we neither think nor know what we say. I remember well, says he, that I was invited hither with great earnestness, both by yourself and by the Midianites; and that it was at your request I came, and with a desire to do all in my power for your service. But what am I able to do against the divine will and power? I had not the least thought of speaking one good word in favour of the Israelitish army, or of the blessings which God has in store for them; but since he has decreed to make them great and happy, I have been compelled to speak as you have

* Jewish Antiquities, book 4, chap. 6.

heard, instead of what I had otherwise designed to say."

Upon a careful consideration of the passage that "Balaam went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but set his face towards the wilderness," it appears to me evident, from the whole narrative, that this unholy man, seeing the extreme disappointment of his employer, and fearful of losing the rewards promised to his successful exertions, was fully prepared to curse the seed of Jacob from the summit of Peor, in the immediate vicinity of the idol worshipped by the Moabites; but that his intention was diverted by the spirit of God, which, against his own will, caused him to pronounce a blessing instead of a malediction. It is remarkable, that each prophecy thus extorted, as it were, from the reluctant lips of the seer, increases in earnestness and glowing warmth of expression, as if the more anxious he felt to execrate the Israelites, the more eloquent he became in their praise. Nothing can well exceed the animated fervour of the language, and the graceful variety of the comparisons, in this eminently beautiful composition. So engrossed was Balaam's soul by the pure spirit of prophecy which at that moment absorbed it, that the noblest expressions suggested themselves to clothe the sacred inspirations which he was miraculously compelled to deliver.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Balaam's third prophecy.

BALAAM, having "set his face towards the wilderness," the plain upon which the triumphant hosts of Israel lay encamped, was probably about to gratify the sovereign of Moab by consigning them over to the malignity of those demons whom the latter, no doubt, imagined were capable of exterminating them, when, unexpectedly, the prophetic afflatus came upon him, "and he took up his parable," that is, he delivered the divine oracle in parabolical or figurative terms, "and said" to the anxious sovereign of the Moabites,

Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said,
And the man whose eyes are open hath said :
He hath said which heard the words of God—
Which saw the vision of the Almighty,
Falling into a trance but having his eyes open—
 How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,
 And thy tabernacles, O Israel !
 As the valleys are they spread forth,
 As gardens by the river's side—
 As the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted,
 And as cedars beside the waters.
He shall pour the water out of his buckets,
And his seed shall be in many waters,
And his king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.
 God brought him forth out of Egypt !
 He hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn :

He shall eat up the nations his enemies,
 And shall break their bones and pierce them through with his arrows.
 He crouched, he lay down as a lion,
 And as a great lion: who shall stir him up?
 Blessed is he that bleaseth thee,
 -And cursed is he that curseth thee.

In the introduction to this prophecy, how beautifully do the terms rise in force and comprehensiveness! First, the prophet simply mentions himself as Balaam, the son of Beor, and no doubt well known as the celebrated seer or diviner of Mesopotamia, nevertheless, claiming respect for his own person by the mention, secondly, of his father's name, who was, we may reasonably suppose, known as a man of distinction in those days; for Balaam would scarcely have referred to the author of his birth directly to Balak had not his parent been a person of some consequence, and therefore not a stranger, by repute at least, if personally so, to the king of Moab. Balaam's manner of mentioning his father's name, appears to me fully to warrant the presumption that he was a man of family. He next refers to his sacred office, heightening the parallelism by a direct allusion to the divine communication. In the next pair of lines, the immediate presence of the celestial influence is expressed, the gradational parallelism being very happily exhibited; he not only "heard the words of God," but "saw the vision of the Almighty;" hearing the words of God being a less strong indication of prophetic influence than seeing the vision, in which the heavenly communication was more vividly presented to the mind

than by the mere fact of hearing a voice. But in this instance he both *heard* and *saw*, so that nothing could be added to strengthen the revelation here made to him.

There is great solemnity in these couplets, and the climax closes with a significant declaration of the reality of the whole scene;—that the words of God entered into the ears, and the celestial vision passed into the mind, of one who possessed all his faculties unembarrassed at the time, and not only so, but strengthened by immediate intercourse with the Divinity. Nothing can more directly confirm the circumstance of Balaam's inspiration than these passages. He seems to declare it by way of justification of what is to follow, for it was in spite of his own will that he was made the vehicle of a blessing, where both he and his employer sought a curse. He thus shows the divine predominancy which can baffle human intentions where they would interpose betwixt the Deity and the all-wise determinations of his providence.

It will be observed, that the exordium of this fine poem differs much from those of the two preceding prophecies. It relates to Balaam in his accredited character of prophet or seer. He maintains his inspiration, but begins by characterizing himself as the son of Beor, of whom nothing appears to be known, though from the circumstance of Balaam mentioning his father's name, as if with a view of proclaiming the respectability of his birth—for of this the orientals have been at all times exceedingly tenacious, preserving their genealogies with remarkable care,

tracing them to the most primitive times—it is probable that Beor was a name of some consideration in his own country. It is presumed by some learned men that Beor was father to Bela, the first king of Edom. Under this supposition, Balaam must have been the brother of a king, consequently a person of the first distinction, and this assumption is, I think, favoured by the whole tenor of the history. Balak at first sends an embassy of distinguished men to solicit the prophet's presence to pronounce a malediction upon his enemies, but finding he did not return with his messengers, who were loaded with presents to induce him to accompany them, the king of Moab dispatches a second embassy, composed of the first nobles of the land, bearing still more costly rewards and soliciting his presence at the Moabitish capital; showing him such deference and respect as renders it abundantly evident that whether the son or brother of a king, or neither, he was no ordinary person. His bearing, too, in the presence of Balak, is independent and even lofty; he issues commands with a tone of authority; he addresses the sovereign of Moab, as if they were upon terms of perfect equality; under all these circumstances we may fairly presume that he was a man of high kindred alliance, and of some civil distinction, independent of what might have accrued to him from his skill in the practice of enchantments. It is obvious, that in the proem of this third prediction, and a highly elevated composition it is throughout, he refers to the responsibility of his own character in his social

relations, and then to his distinguished elevation as a prophet of God, no less than as a diviner of the Moabitish sovereign. Having mentioned the name of his father, probably still further to enhance his own personal respectability, he refers immediately to himself in his *professional* character :—

And the man whose eyes are open hath said ;

that is, the man who, while he was awake, received the divine revelations which enabled him to predict the events of futurity about to be proclaimed by him ; for if we suppose that these revelations were communicated to the prophet in his sleep, it would detract greatly from their credibility. He might thus have been under an illusion, but of those visions which were presented to his mind while he was in the full exercise of all his faculties, there could be no mistake. Many commentators, however, imagine that the word translated *open* in our common version, should have been rendered *shut*, signifying that the bard of Mesopotamia was in the habit of falling into trances, before he could be conscious of those visions which presented to his mental perceptions matters still lying in a state of advancing completion in the matrix of time, to be brought forth in their glorious consummation, when the epoch of their maturity should arrive.

A trance, we must recollect, is different from sleep ; in the latter, the bodily faculties, though quiescent, are not suspended, while the mental faculties certainly are almost entirely so ; in the

former, the mental perceptions are not in the least interrupted, while the corporeal faculties are in a positive state of suspension. Persons in trances have a perfect consciousness of what takes place in their presence; their reason is clear and undisturbed; in fact, the whole intellectual machinery goes on as distinctly and as accurately as during the absence of sleep. We must not, therefore, confound the confused objects and offuscated ideas which sometimes crowd upon the mind in slumber, with those definite and accurate representations of events commonly exhibited to the mental perceptions during the existence of a trance. St. Paul was in a trance when carried up into the third heaven, where were actually communicated to him "visions and revelations of the Lord." He speaks not of these visions and revelations as things indefinite and intangible, but as communications really made; and it is certain, that while under the reception of such communications, he must have possessed all his mental perceptions, perfect and unsuspended. He did not declare those visions and revelations, because he was under a divine prohibition to keep silence, for they were such "as it was not lawful for man to utter."

With this understanding of the word trance, the objection taken to the rendering of the passage under notice, by our translators, will not appear unreasonable. Calmet takes the clause to signify the man whose eyes, though formerly shut, were now open, and consequently able to reveal what he saw during his trance; that is,

the man, who, before he was endowed with the gift of prophecy, was in this especial particular blind like other men, having, through the divine afflatus breathed upon him, received powers of spiritual apprehension, which enabled him to perceive and understand these mystical revelations made to such only as Almighty God has selected for these mysterious communications of his will; this man is now enabled to see visions which lay open future events, so far as the Deity is willing to reveal them to his appointed servants. It is no easy matter to come to the exact signification of the words under consideration, as so many interpretations appear equally plausible, and so alike bearing the probability of truth, that we might embrace either with almost equal satisfaction.

Dodd's note upon the words, "the man whose eyes are open," is very sensible, and much to the purpose. "This clause should rather be rendered, 'the man whose eyes are opened,' which agrees exactly with the Vulgate, approved by Le Clerc and Calmet; 'the man whose eyes were shut,' formerly shut, but now opened; referring either to that part of the history, wherein we are told, that though the ass saw the angel, Balaam saw him not, till 'the Lord opened his eyes;' or, to that more sublime intelligence wherewith God had now enlightened his understanding; 'the man whose eyes are opened' to the wonderful knowledge of future things, through God's spirit. The first verse shows that his mind was thus illuminated. There 'Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord,' &c., and in the next verse we

are told to what his eyes were opened;—‘he saw the vision of the Almighty.’ Some have absurdly supposed from hence that Balaam was a blind man, though frequent mention is made of his seeing Israel.”*

It is a fact clearly beyond dispute, that the seer of Mesopotamia distinctly asserts his gift of prophecy, and being a bad man, as well as an enemy to Israel, this was the strongest possible voucher for the truth of those oracles which predicted blessings on that very people whom the prophet was expected, by his royal patron, to execrate.

Herder, following other learned men, among whom were St. Gregory of Nyssa, and Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, and some of less note, considers the whole scene of the ass falling, its miraculous gift of speech and temporary powers of reasoning, together with Balaam’s account of the angel interrupting his journey, and threatening him with divine retribution if he attempted to run counter to God’s commands, as a mere vision in which the divine reproach was made known, and the divine commands conveyed, not by oral communication, but by phantasmal representation, and some colour is given to this notion by the words—

Which saw the vision of the Almighty,
Falling into a trance, but having his eyes open.

He not only heard the voice of God, but saw him in a vision during his trance. This is as

* See chapter xxii. 41 ; xxiii. 18, and verse 2 of this chapter.

Herder interprets it, who is anxious to get rid of the physical impossibility of the ass speaking, but wherefore, I really cannot comprehend. Why he should desire to remove difficulties by the addition of others, is strange, since he does not, after all, abate the perplexity, if there is any in taking the statement of the historian as a simple fact, but vainly attempts to strengthen its credibility by conjectures which give it the air of an ingenious fable rather than of a literal historical event.

I can see no satisfactory reason whatever for discrediting the literal narrative of the ass speaking and reproaching its master with inhumanity. All the arguments against it are at once answered by the plain fact that it was a miracle, for surely whatever objectors may say, God could just as readily open the mouth of Balaam's ass as divide the Red Sea, and we have full as much reason for doubting the statement of the serpent speaking to Eve as of the ass speaking to Balaam. Both events are recorded upon the same inspired authority, which ought to place them above question or cavil.

Much ingenuity has been exhausted upon this subject, to prove that the jaws of the ass are so physically constituted as to be altogether incapable of uttering articulate sounds. What then? so are the serpent's. But if God chose to make the ass's tongue the vehicle of speech, was he incapable of doing so? Why, then, should ingenious men waste so much time in attempting to prove, what was never denied, that the ass is by nature incapable of speech; but will they

presume to deny that it is capable of speaking through the instrumentality of Him with whom "all things are possible," except only the possibility of erring?

The words, "into a trance," do not appear in the original, but have been supplied by our translators; it is therefore supposed by some learned authorities that the word "falling" simply expresses an act of adoration on the part of the prophet, he prostrating himself in reverential awe when made conscious of the divine presence.

Le Clerc has suggested a solution of the difficulty of the ass reproaching Balaam, and the latter answering her as if there was nothing extraordinary in a dumb animal exercising the gift of speech, by supposing that Balaam was acquainted with the doctrine of the metempsychosis, promulgated by the gymnosophists, or brahminical philosophers. Believing, therefore, in this doctrine—as Le Clerc supposes—that the souls of men transmigrated into the bodies of brutes, the bard of Pethor was not at all amazed at hearing the ass speak, but concluded, as a matter of course, that it was the spirit of a rational creature discoursing through the organs of one by nature dumb and without reason.

It is impossible to accept such a conjecture, as so many improbabilities stand in array against it, that we have no security for its truth. Besides, those Indian philosophers who maintain the doctrine of a transmigration of souls, believe that the corporeal faculties of the man are not transferred to the brute when the human soul takes possession of its body. There is no

possibility, as they conceive, of distinguishing an animal, into which the spirit of man has so passed, from one the frame of which possesses no such occupant. And for this reason certain sects of Hindoos refrain from depriving any creature, even the most noxious reptile, of life, lest they should be really guilty of homicide; and surely they would not be thus fastidious if they could discriminate between the animal which has become an object of the metempsychosis and one that has not. The Genevese divine has been more happy in his views upon the word "falling," disassociated from the phrase "into a trance," which our translators have added. He understands it to refer to Balaam's falling when the progress of the ass was obstructed by the celestial envoy. This appears to me a very reasonable interpretation, and if admitted, the meaning will be—'This is the declaration of him who has heard the voice of God, commanding him to speak what shall be revealed to him—who has seen the heavenly messenger, which caused him to fall prostrate under the influence of sacred fear, having his eyes, which were before unable to perceive the angel, suddenly opened, so that he could clearly discern who stood in his path.'

It was not reverence which actuated the prophet under this view of the matter, but terror; and this is in perfect accordance with the general character, as presented to us in the sacred history, of that selfish and unrighteous man.

Supposing what has just been suggested to be the true interpretation of the passage, in

which Balaam is represented as falling into a trance, there will be observed much astuteness and ingenuity in the wily seer thus again drawing Balak's attention to the circumstance, so little calculated upon by the king of Moab and so unwelcome to his avaricious mercenary, that he whom the former had sent for expressly to curse his enemies was absolutely under the guidance of a superior influence, which he could neither direct nor control; and it was at the same time a seasonable preparation to the ear of the royal heathen for the prediction which the bard of Pethor was about to deliver.

Although Balak had, from the very first, been warned by Balaam, that the latter was under the superior control of Him who can alone frustrate the purposes of wicked men and convert their evil designs to good, still, the king of Moab does not appear, up to this time, to have entertained a thought that the mercenary prophet was unable to obey the suggestions of his own desire. Balaam, therefore, on the present occasion urges this fact, not, indeed, in stronger terms, but much more forcibly, by inference, showing that he delivered what he actually heard and saw, not what he solicited to hear and see. There is, too, a certain solemnity throughout the exordium of this sacred poem admirably calculated to fix the attention of that gentile sovereign to whom it was so unexpectedly addressed.

It cannot escape the reader's attention, that throughout this sublime prophecy, exclusive of the introduction, none of the expressions are

literal, save those in the concluding distich. Unlike those in the first prediction, to which they oppose a striking contrast, they are figurative in the highest degree, and in consequence of this their immediate application is not readily perceived; but although the allusions may not be always directly obvious, the images are nevertheless exceedingly expressive, and, in fact, when they seem to be obscure, they are really so, for the most part, only because they allude to oriental usages, with which we on this side of the globe are altogether unfamiliar.

Throughout the exordium, the complexion of every line is, as I have shown, strikingly characteristic of that form of composition which it so fitly adorns. Although no imagery is employed to embellish it, still the metrical artifice is manifestly present; and surely no one will deny that anything can be further removed from the ordinary structure of prose. The third person being used for the first, not only imparts elevation to the thought, but dignity to the individual to which it refers. There is a refinement in it, which at once carries our minds to the highest conditions of social dignity, impressing us strongly with the conviction, that Balaam was as well-bred and refined as he was superior in mental endowments. We see nothing of the ordinary, nothing of the low-born man in this gifted genius, but one as much mentally elevated as he was naturally depraved. The substitution of the third person for the first, moreover, gives the speaker an opportunity of recording the gift of vaticination with which he was endowed,

and of his immediate intercourse with the omnipotent Jehovah, without that parade of ostentatious egotism, which would have appeared, had he placed his own individuality ostensibly in a more prominent point of view. We now see only the *agent*, not the *person*, the offensive character of the individual being merged in that of the prophet, behind the lustre of which the former is cast into shade ; and although we know who that prophet is, for he himself declares it in the first hemistich of the proem, his personal identity seems, nevertheless, brought into less immediate approximation with his vicarious function, in thus referring to the inspired missionary rather than to the individual man. If this should be considered as too great a refinement of critical exposition, it will at least be admitted that the change from the first to the third person has added grace to the passage, if it has not signalized it by any higher poetical attribute. The extreme simplicity of this introduction presents a very felicitous, and no less judicious, contrast with the more ornate beauty of what follows, as will be presently seen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Balaam's third prophecy, continued.

I HAVE said that this third prophecy of Balaam abounds with images of singular force and beauty, imparting to it the character of the highest poetical inspiration. Let us now see how these encomiums are borne out by an examination of the poem.

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,
And thy tabernacles, O Israel !
As the valleys are they spread forth,
As gardens by the river's side,
As the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted,
And as cedar trees beside the waters.

It will at once be perceived that the first pair of lines present a beautiful parallelism, in which the corresponding phrases rise gracefully in force of signification, tabernacles referring to more permanent dwellings than common tents, the former term being likewise associated with that sacred erection in the wilderness, into which the divine presence first entered in a visible form after the exodus ; and Israel being the patriarch's name of honour, by which he was pre-eminently distinguished, rises in dignity above the mere patriarchal cognomen.

In the fragments* to Taylor's edition of

* See Fragment 206.

Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, there is the following, to my mind, unsupported conclusion: "In the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah we find the prophet advising Zion—'widen,' that is, spread farther out, 'the place of thy tent,' that it may occupy a greater space, 'and the curtains of thy tabernacle enlarge,' do not stop those who are employed in this business: 'lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy pins,' or get thicker pins to be driven into the ground, that they may sustain greater stress. Here we have a distinction between a tent, or superior kind of dwelling, and a tabernacle, or inferior kind. Balaam makes the same distinction (Numbers xxiv. 5),

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,
And thy tabernacles, O Israel!

whence I suspect, that by tents he means those of the chiefs, leaders, principals of the tribes; and by tabernacles, those of the lower class of people." Now I draw the opposite conclusion from that very passage in Isaiah, which this ingenious writer quotes to support it. I consider that it shows tabernacles to have been superior to tents. These latter, being inhabited by the many, by the commonalty, the soldiers, and their families, were to be widened or enlarged; while the tabernacles, being occupied by the superior orders, that is, by the few, their curtains or decorations were to be improved. The whole passage of Isaiah is of course figurative, but it represents a Jewish encampment. The prophet placing tents before tabernacles is no argument in favour of the superiority of the former, but,

as I apprehend, the reverse, for it was surely more natural that he should mention the general encampment, which conveyed the ideas of multitude and concentrated power, than the tabernacles of their rulers, which merely suggested those of rank and civil dignity. The sublimest thought ranked first on the prophet's mind, and was accordingly first delivered. Besides, we find the word tent commonly applied to the most wretched description of nomadic dwelling, but tabernacle never; and why was the latter term adopted to characterize the holy sanctuary in the wilderness, which was variously embellished and elaborately wrought, according to the means and capacities of the times, if the tabernacle were really an inferior order of erection to the tent? Surely the sanctuary in which God delighted to dwell, in which he was actually present, would have hardly been desecrated by an appellation which characterized an inferior order of structure. Above all, I think that the opening couplet of Balaam's third prophecy at once settles the question of superiority as belonging to the tabernacle. Looking on the Israelitish encampment, and seeing it spreading over the adjacent plain, he exclaims with prophetic rapture—

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,
And thy tabernacles, O Israel!

Here the obvious parallelism, in my opinion, settles the question of superiority: the sense rises from tents to tabernacles, as from Jacob to Israel—the one his name given to the patriarch

by his parents, the other his name bestowed by God, and consequently the more honourable. It will be observed, too, that in the two couplets which follow, the distinction of inferiority and superiority is maintained in the alternate lines of each couplet. The tents are compared to spreading vallies, the tabernacles to cultivated gardens; the former to lign-aloes, the latter to stately cedars. In the third couplet reference is made to the posterity of Jacob in the gross—the inhabitants of tents; and in the fourth to their princes—the occupiers of tabernacles. In the verses preceding the latter four the encampment of the Israelites is compared to fruitful valleys, richly cultivated gardens, spicy trees, and lofty cedars, the different objects of comparison rising in strength and terminating in a fine climax; for the cedars of Libanus were held by the Jews to be among the noblest productions of the vegetable kingdom, consequently, the stately tabernacles of the heads of tribes and rulers among the Israelites were fitly compared to them. The lign-aloe was an extremely fragrant tree, which grew in Arabia. It appears to have been one of the perfumed woods burned at the heathen sacrifices. The words, “which the Lord hath planted,” probably signify no more than that they were not the result of cultivation, but of spontaneous growth; and this will better apply, as an object of poetical comparison, to the tents occupied by the multitude, than to the tabernacles occupied by the few.

That the ancient cedar trees of Libanus really were, as the Jews held them to be, among the

most magnificent products of the soil, may be gathered from Maundrell's description of them in his "Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem."* "These noble trees," says that enterprising traveller, "grow among the snow, near the highest part of Lebanon, and are remarkable, as well for their own age and largeness as for those frequent allusions to them in the word of God. Some of them are very old and of prodigious bulk, others younger and of a smaller size. Of the former I could reckon only sixteen, but the latter are very numerous. I measured one of the largest, and found it twelve yards and six inches in girth, and yet sound, and thirty-seven yards in the spread of its branches. At about five or six yards from the ground, it was divided into five limbs, each of which was equal to a great tree."

"The cedar loves cold and mountainous places; if the top is cut it dies. The branches which it shoots, lessening as they rise, give it the form of a pyramid."

Le Bruyn, in his journey to the Holy Land, says, "the leaves of the tree point upwards, and the fruit hangs downwards; it grows like cones of the pine tree, but is longer, harder, and fuller, and not easily separated from the stalk. It contains a seed like that of the cypress tree, and yields a glutinous thick sort of resin, transparent and of strong smell, which does not run, but falls drop by drop. This author tells us, that, having measured two cedars on mount

Lebanon, he found one to be fifty palms in girth, the other forty-seven. Naturalists distinguish several sorts of cedars; but we confine ourselves to that of Lebanon, of which only Scripture speaks."*

The wood* of this tree is said to be almost imperishable; for historians assert that some of its timber was discovered in the temple of Apollo at Utica two thousand years old; and there appears to be no just reason for doubting their testimony. Linnæus classes it with the juniper tree. It will hence be seen, that the eloquent description of the poet could not have terminated in a nobler or more appropriate comparison. It is to be remarked, that the gradational parallelism does not cease with the first distich of this prophecy, but is carried on through the two following, the terms of comparison rising in each, cultivated gardens being richer in vegetable treasures than valleys, in which the growth is spontaneous, and cedar trees being more magnificent and stately than the lign-aloe. Indeed, the whole passage is eminently poetical, and at the same time managed with consummate artifice.

He shall pour water out of his buckets.

Here is a very apt image of fecundity, water being a main cause of the earth's fruitfulness, and in tropical climates is naturally valued among the choicest riches of the earth. The clause, therefore, signifies, that the descendants of Jacob shall multiply greatly; and here, again,

* See Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, art. Cedar.

is an incidental confirmation, given, too, by an alien from the stock of Abraham, of that promise made to the righteous patriarch, that his seed should increase prodigiously in ages to come. This passage has been variously expounded, and is generally admitted to be of difficult interpretation; but I apprehend the difficulty solely arises from a want of familiarity with oriental habits and usages. Balaam remarkably confirms the divine assurance made several centuries before his time in that very land of which the descendants of Abraham were about to take possession. The image he employs to signify the vast augmentation of the seed of that patriarch, appears to me to be capable of a clear and easy exposition, notwithstanding that so many eminent Hebrew scholars have been puzzled at the imaginary difficulty which it has presented to them, but only, as I conceive, because they were utterly ignorant of certain eastern practices.

He shall pour water out of his buckets ;

that is, as abundance springs from water poured over the land, this being the fruitful cause, under the divine direction, of its productiveness, so from Israel shall spring a numerous posterity, which shall overspread the whole country. "Out of his buckets," refers to the mode of irrigation practised in the east, which is no less simple than effectual, and is almost universally effected by means of small vessels, or what may be designated buckets in our own vernacular tongue. A number of these vessels, which are called, by the natives of Hindostan, cudgerees pots,

and are earthen jars with round capacious bodies and small necks, being attached to a large wheel that revolves close over the surface of a well spring; these vessels, during its rotation, are successively filled with water and emptied into a trench, cut upon the borders of the well, or artificial reservoir, from which numerous aqueducts branch off through the lands to be watered. Various modifications of this method are employed in different parts of Hindostan, the application of the mode occasionally varying, though the principle is everywhere nearly the same. 'As the buckets or jars discharge their contents into the trench that conveys them over the soil, thus causing it to bring forth bountifully, so shall the children of Israel be dispersed over the region, which shall eventually become crowded with a numerous population.' The effect of this mode of irrigation in India appears almost magical; in the course of a few weeks it often happens, that large districts, which had presented to the eye a mere arid and barren waste, are overspread with the most grateful verdure, vegetation of all varieties covering the land, trees putting forth at once their blossoms and their fruits, grain of different kinds maturing under the hot but genial rays of an eastern sun, and every thing bearing upon it the hue and aspect of the richest fertility.

In the autobiography of the renowned Baber, emperor of the Moguls, and who, in fact, established the present almost extinguished dynasty, there is a very circumstantial account of the

mode of irrigation adopted by the natives of Hindostan.

“ Most of the districts of Hindostan are plain and level. Though this country contains so many provinces, none of them has any artificial canals for irrigation. It is watered only by rivers, though in some places, too, there is standing water. Even in those cities which are so situated as to admit of digging a water-course, and thereby bringing water into them, yet no water has been brought in. There may be several reasons for this. One of them is, that water is not absolutely requisite for the crops and gardens. The autumnal crop is nourished by the rains of the rainy season. It is remarkable that there is a spring crop though no rain falls. They raise water for the young trees, till they are one or two years old, by means of a water-wheel, or buckets; after that time it is not at all necessary to water them. Some vegetables they water. In Lahore De-bālpûr, Sehrend, and the neighbouring districts, they water by means of a wheel. They first take two ropes, of a length suited to the depth of the well, and fasten each of them, so as to form a circle; between the two circular ropes they insert pieces of wood, connecting them, and to these they fix water-pitchers. The ropes so prepared, with the pitchers attached to them by means of the pieces of wood, they throw over a wheel that is placed at the top of the well. On the one end of the axle-tree of this wheel they place another wheel with teeth, and to the side of this last they apply a third, which they

make with an upright axle. When the bullocks turn this last wheel round, its teeth working upon those of the second wheel, turn the large wheel on which is the circle of pitchers. They make a trough under the place where the water is discharged by the revolution of the pitchers; and from this trough convey the water to whatever place it may be required. They have another contrivance for raising water for irrigation in Agra, Biâna, Chândwâr, and that quarter, by means of a bucket. This is very troublesome, and filthy besides. On the brink of a well they fix in strongly two forked pieces of wood, and between their prongs insert a roller. They then fasten a great water-bucket to long ropes, which they bring over the roller; one end of this rope they tie to the bullock, and while one man drives the bullock, another is employed to pour the water out of the bucket, when it reaches the top of the well. Every time the bullock raises the bucket from the well, as it is let down again, the rope slides along the bullock-course, is defiled with dung, and in this filthy condition falls into the well. In many instances where fields require to be watered, the men and women draw water in buckets and irrigate them."*

The obscurity of the line,

He shall pour water out of his buckets,

arises to the general reader from his ignorance

* Memoirs of Zehir-ed-din Mohammed Baber, translated by Leyden and Erskine, pp. 314, 315.

of the practice among oriental agriculturists just explained. This allusion, however, being no doubt perfectly familiar to Balak and the Israelites whom he besought Balaam to curse, needed no interpretation; for, as I have already stated, most of the customs of the east have continued unchanged from the remotest periods to the present time, so that a knowledge of the local habits of modern India will frequently throw great light upon the presumed obscurities of the Bible. The line to which I have been referring is copiously expressive, and no less full of meaning than it is eloquent and picturesque.

And his seed shall be in many waters.

There is, it must be confessed, some difficulty in rendering the meaning of this clause as obvious as might be wished. It has been imagined, and I am disposed to think truly, to allude to the sowing of rice; for, unquestionably, the agricultural practices of the east have been frequently made the subjects of poetical illustration in the Old Testament. "The ground," says Dr. Adam Clarke, "must not only be well watered but flooded, in order to serve for the proper growth of this grain. The rice sown in many waters must be most fruitful. By an elegant and chaste metaphor, all this is applied to the procreation of a numerous posterity."

This is, in my judgment, a happy exposition of a passage universally allowed to be extremely obscure; not only rendering it intelli-

ble, but at the same time investing it with a lofty tone of eloquence, as richly descriptive as it is exquisitely poetical. The line may be thus amplified, in order to embrace its full extension, or at least presumable latitude, of meaning. 'His seed shall be as abundant as rice growing in many waters, which not only render it productive, but are absolutely essential to its germination.' This interpretation will be readily apprehended by persons who have visited countries where rice is grown. In India, for instance, the rice-plats are always enclosed by a mound of mud, which prevents the water from escaping. The seed is kept continually covered with this fructifying element, until the ears are formed and the grain begins to ripen, when the ground is allowed to dry gradually, the water being readily evaporated by the intense heat of a tropical sun.

"About the middle of February," says Mr. Ward,* "if there should be rain, the farmer ploughs his ground for the first time, and again in March or April: the last ploughing is performed with great care, and if there has been rain the ground is weeded. Sometimes rain at this period is delayed fifteen days, or even a month; but in all cases the land is ploughed three times before sowing. Two good bullocks, worth from eight to sixteen rupees each, will plough in one season fifteen or twenty bighas†

* See View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos, vol. I. pp. 101—105.

† The bigha is about a hundred and twenty feet square.

of land, and if very good cattle, twenty-five bighas. Horses are never used in agriculture.”

“The farmer, about the beginning of May, casts his seed into the ground, in much the same manner as the English farmer; and harrows it with an instrument like a ladder, upon which a man stands to press it down.

“After sowing, the field is watched during the day, to keep off the birds. If there should not be rain in four or five days after sowing, and if the sun should be very hot, the seed is nearly destroyed, and in some cases the ploughing and sowing are repeated. The farmer preserves the best of his corn for seed; twenty-four pounds of which, worth about two annas,* are in general sufficient for one bigha. Should he be obliged to buy seed, it will cost double the sum it would have done in the time of harvest.

“When the rice has grown half a foot high, the farmer, to prevent its becoming too rank, also to loosen the earth and destroy the weeds, draws over it a piece of wood with spikes; and when almost a foot high he weeds it.

“The corn being nearly ripe, the farmer erects a stage of bamboos in his field, sufficiently high to be a refuge from wild beasts, covers it with thatch, and places a servant there to watch, especially during the night. When a buffalo or a wild hog comes into the field, the keeper takes a wisp of lighted straw in one hand, and in the other a dried skin, containing broken bricks, pots, &c., bound up on

* About fourpence.

all sides, and in this manner he approaches the animal, shaking his lighted straw, and making a loud noise, on which it immediately runs away.

“In the middle of August, about four months after sowing, the farmer cuts his corn with a sickle, resembling in shape that used in England. The corn is then bound in sheaves, and thrown on the ground, where it remains two or three days: it is never reared up to dry: some even carry it home the day it is cut. Eight persons will cut a bigha in a day. Each labourer receives about two-pence a day, besides tobacco and oil to rub his body. When the corn is dry, the harvest folks generally put the sheaves, which are very light, on their heads, and carry them home, each person taking twenty, thirty, or forty small sheaves; a few farmers carry the produce on bullocks. The poor are permitted to glean the fields after harvest, as in Europe.

“The rice having been brought home, some pile it in round stacks, and others immediately separate it from the husks, with bullocks; in performing which operation, the farmer fastens two or more bullocks together, side by side, and drives them round upon a quantity of sheaves spread upon the ground: in about three hours, one layer, weighing about thirty mauns* will thus be trodden out. The Bengal farmers muzzle the ox in treading out the corn, till the upper sheaves are trodden to mere straw, and then unmuzzle them; a few muzzle them altogether.

* The maun is about seven English pounds.

After the corn has been separated from the straw, one person lets it fall from his hands, while others with large hand-fans winnow it; which operation having been performed, the farmer either deposits the corn in what is called a gola, or sends it to the corn-merchant to clear off his debt. The gola is a low round house, in which the grain is deposited upon a stage, and held in on all sides by a frame of bamboos lined with mats, containing a door in the side. The farmer piles his straw in stacks, and sells it, or gives it to his cattle. In Bengal, grass is never cut and dried like hay; and in the dry season, when there is no grass, cattle are fed with straw. The scythe is unknown to the Bengal farmer, who cuts even his grass with the sickle.

“In April, the farmer sows other lands for his second and principal harvest; at which time, as it is meant to be transplanted, he sows a great quantity of rice in a small space. About the middle of July he ploughs another piece of ground, which, as the rains have set in, is now become as soft as mud; and to this place he transplants the rice which he sowed in April, and which is embanked to retain the water. The rice stands in water, more or less, during the three following months; if there should be a deficiency of rain after the transplanting, the farmer resorts to watering the field. In November or December he reaps this crop, which is greater or less than the former, according to the soil and situation.”

Though this extract is long, the account

which it gives of the mode of growing rice is, I think, sufficiently curious to justify its insertion as an illustration of the passage under notice. This grain is much valued in tropical countries, as it is the universal pabulum of the orientals, the staff of life of at least four hundred millions of the human race. Considered with reference to this fact, the clause contains a significant and eloquent allusion to the prodigious increase of Jacob's posterity, which was ultimately "as the sand on the sea-shore for multitude." Commentators, however, differ materially in their interpretation of this obscure passage. Le Clerc renders it, "from his boughs the waters shall distil," which he considers as expressive of the fertility and abundant produce of the country to be possessed by the Israelites. Bishop Lowth sanctions this reading. Herder, understanding waters to mean many people, renders the whole couplet thus:—

Waters run from their fountains,
And many streams shall be his offspring.

But to my apprehension, this rendering, instead of abating the perplexity, increases it tenfold. The first line has not much meaning, and the last is unintelligible. The former is the mere assertion of a common fact known to every one; for whence can waters run but from their fountains? the latter is extremely harsh, and the meaning altogether equivocal. In my judgment, there is neither poetry nor eloquence in this reading, but a tortured and bewildering obscurity. It must, nevertheless, be admitted,

that the learned and philosophic German has succeeded in translating some passages of these noble predictions with uncommon felicity, as the reader has had many opportunities of seeing in the foregoing chapters.

I confess it appears to me that the pious and profoundly erudite men, who contributed the aid of their great talents to form our authorized version of the sacred scriptures, have been eminently happy in rendering this difficult passage, notwithstanding the obscurity from which they have failed to release it; that obscurity arising altogether, as I conceive, from an allusion to a particular practice of eastern agriculturalists, with which Europeans in general are not familiar. In Herder's rendering, the parallelism is more distinctly exhibited than in the common version, though even here an accurate scrutiny cannot fail to trace it:—

He shall pour water out of his buckets,
And his seed shall be in many waters.

The “many waters” are an advance upon the parallel word in the first line, where it is mentioned generally, but in the second with a definite and specific force. In both verses allusion is made to the increase of Jacob's posterity. ‘He shall increase like the fruits of a well-watered soil, and his descendants shall overspread and take possession of many lands, the territories of numerous petty kings.’ This was verified in their subjugation of Canaan. The parallelism, though faintly traced, is not

the less positively present, and exhibits manifest poetical design.

His king shall be higher than Agag.

Agag was a general name for the sovereigns of Amalek, as Pharaoh was for those of Egypt. The Amalekites were, at this time, a people of great political importance among the nations of Canaan. Balaam thus foretels that the Israelites shall become a distinguished nation, possessing a dominion more extensive than that of the Amalekites, then probably one of the greatest political communities of that region of the globe, though very little appears to be positively known respecting them. The power of this people was shown in their conflict with the Israelites, shortly after the latter had passed the Red Sea. Scarcely had this been accomplished when, in the desert of Rephidim, they were assaulted by the armies of Amalek, which slaughtered great numbers of those who had not yet joined the main body. Moses commanded Joshua to attack the aggressors; this he did, while the Hebrew lawgiver accompanied by Aaron and Hur, repaired to a mountain in the neighbourhood, whence he could behold the battle, which, after an obstinate struggle, was obtained by the Israelites, God defeating their foes with great carnage. They were clearly a powerful people.

**His king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.**

‘Not only shall the king, destined to sit upon the throne of Judah be pre-eminent among the monarchs of the earth, but the regions over which his empire will extend, shall be, in the highest degree, prosperous. The seed of Jacob will so “increase and multiply” as to replenish the country depopulated by their armies, and overcome all the nations by whom they shall be surrounded.’ Agag is used, in the first hemistich of the couplet just quoted, by an elegant synecdoche, to represent the entire monarchical power of Canaan. This country was divided into several principalities, among which Amalek appears to have one of the chief; though Calmet says of this people, “we cannot assign the particular place of their habitation; and it does not appear that they had cities, though one is mentioned (1 Samuel xv. 5.) They lived generally in wandering parties, in caves, and in tents.” The clause, then, expressing that Israel’s sovereign shall be “higher than Agag,” declares with great force the final supremacy of Jacob’s descendants over the gentile possessors of the soil towards which they were marching. It exhibits a fine example of condensation, unrivalled by anything in the compositions of Moses himself, which are eminently distinguished for this quality. The parallelism, too, is accurately preserved in the succeeding verse; for this grace is always introduced where it can be employed with advantage. The “king” is to be “higher,” and the “kingdom” to be “exalted.” These parallels are so naturally as well as agreeably introduced, that the artifice

altogether escapes us, and we only feel the beauty, without being conscious of the artificial medium through which it is conveyed.

It is observed by Bishop Newton, that "either Agag was prophesied of by name particularly, as Cyrus and Josiah were several years before they were born; or Agag was the general name of the kings of Amalek, as Pharaoh was of the kings of Egypt, and Abimelech of the kings of the Philistines. Amalek was at this time a great and flourishing kingdom; in the twentieth verse it is styled, 'the first of the nations;' and therefore for the king of Israel to be exalted above the king of Amalek was a great exaltation. But it was accomplished by Saul (1 Samuel xv. 7, 8). The first king of Israel subdued Agag, king of the Amalekites, so that it might truly and properly be said,— 'His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted,' as it afterwards was greatly by David and Solomon."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Balaam's third prophecy, continued.

WE now come to the passage in which the comparison to a unicorn is employed, as in the second prophecy; and as it is here extended, or rather amplified by minuter specifications of detail, I shall proceed to consider it more at large than I have yet done.

He hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn.

The rhinoceros, as I have already said, one of the strongest and most determined of quadrupeds, is probably here meant. It is at once remarkable for its power, ferocity, and courage. When excited, it seems to delight in extermination. The learned Bochart imagines a gigantic goat to be intended, and that the prophet designed to foretel that the Israelites would be as eminent among the nations of Canaan, as this huge goat was great above the ordinary races of that animal. There is, however, nothing in Balaam's description which characterizes a goat, an extremely pacific creature; neither is such an interpretation warranted by the context; for the comparison is evidently continued through the two consecutive verses:—

He shall eat up the nations, his enemies,
And shall break their bones, and pierce them through
with his arrows.

Here is nothing to bear out the comparison of a goat; on the contrary, the physical attributes suggested show that such an animal could not have been in the prophet's mind; those attributes however, answer precisely to the character of a rhinoceros, a creature extremely voracious, whose ponderous weight would crush a host of inferior animals, and its snout being armed with a pointed horn, with this it pierces its enemies, causing dreadful havoc whenever that formidable weapon is brought into such sanguinary exercise. This horn is placed on the snout, near the point of the nose, and resembles an ordinary sugar-loaf in shape and size. It stands loose in the socket, and may be often heard to rattle, when the animal, during its pacific moods, moves its head; but the moment it is roused to exasperation, this powerful implement of destruction becomes immovable; and he is enabled to force it several inches into the trunks of trees, with such force does he sometimes assail these unconscious victims of his fury. The horn is blunt; but so prodigious is the strength with which it is impelled by this colossal creature, that the heart of the still more gigantic elephant is often reached by it.

How Bochart managed to persuade himself that so timid a creature as a goat realized the description of the unicorn in Balaam's prophecies, it is difficult to apprehend; for this

animal is not only extremely gentle, but neither courageous nor ferocious; neither able to "eat up" its enemies, nor "to break their bones." It is true, that under the image of a goat, the Hebrew writers sometimes understood princes and great men, as in Zechariah x. 3, the Lord says, "I punished the goats," which signifies, I punished the chiefs or princes of the people. Again, Isaiah xiv. 9,—

Hell from beneath is moved for thee,
to meet thee at thy coming.
It stirreth up the dead for thee,
even all the chief ones* of the earth.

Jeremiah 50, 8, says to the princes of the Jews—

Remove out of the midst of Babylon,
And go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans,
And be as the he-goats before the flocks.

Our blessed Lord says, that at the day of judgment, the goats, that is the reprobate, shall be placed on the left hand, and be condemned to everlasting fire.†

In the first example above quoted, the chiefs or princes of the people are compared to goats, because of the impurity of their lives and of their general licentiousness; so likewise in the second and fourth examples. In the third, from Jeremiah, "be as the he-goats before the flocks," simply signifies, 'as the sentence of destruction is gone forth against Babylon, hasten from the doomed city, and lead the people from it, as he-goats go before the flocks, inducing them to follow.' In none of these examples is there the

* In the margin great goats.

† See Matthew xxv. 33—41.

slightest allusion made to those qualities signified in the prophecies of Balaam. There is no reference whatever either to fierceness, strength, or courage—the comparisons are not to physical but to moral qualities; Balaam, however, is characterizing those personal attributes by which the Israelites shall finally obtain possession of the inheritance promised to their great progenitor Abraham.

Herder adopts a different reading of the passage:—

As of a wild bullock is his race.
 He devoureth the nations his enemies;
 He breaketh in pieces their bones,
 And pierces them with his arrows.

The breaking of the last line, which is continuous in the common version, into two hemistichs, is, I think, a great improvement. It suits well with the original construction and brings out the more obvious symmetry of the parts. The reading here is, no doubt, good and highly poetical, the wild bullock or buffalo being an exceedingly fierce animal, and uniting, moreover, though in an inferior degree, the qualities of strength and courage. This is not, however, upon the whole, by any means so just an interpretation as the rhinoceros, neither does it so well suit with the context, throughout which, not only the idea of extreme ferocity, but likewise of colossal strength, is signified. The bodily power of the buffalo is indeed great, so are his determination and natural fierceness, still the qualities of this animal do not so perfectly realize the picture of devastation presented under

the image of some gigantic creature overthrowing its enemies, trampling upon them, and breaking their bones. Why I therefore conceive the rhinoceros to be intended here is, that what is expressed in the passage now under notice, corresponds so exactly with the character of this huge and destructive quadruped. Beside, the single horn projecting from its nose, brings it into nearer affinity with the received idea of a unicorn than any other animal suggested by commentators.

In addition to the qualities of this animal already mentioned, we are told by Mr. Bruce, that "when pursued and in fear, the rhinoceros possesses an astonishing degree of swiftness, considering his size, the apparent unwieldiness of his body, his great weight before, and the shortness of his legs. He is long, and has a kind of trot, which after a few minutes increases in a great proportion, and takes in a great distance. It is not true that on a plain he beats the horse in swiftness. I have passed him with ease, and seen many worse mounted do the same; and though it is certainly true that a horse can very seldom come up with him, this is owing to his cunning, not to his swiftness. He passes constantly from wood to wood, and forces himself into the thickest part of them. The dry trees are broken down as with a cannon shot, and fall about him in all directions. Others which are more pliable, greener or fuller of sap, are bent back by his weight and the velocity of his motion; and after he has passed, restoring themselves like a green branch to their natural

position, they sweep the incautious pursuer and his horse from the ground, and dash them in pieces against the surrounding trees."

He shall eat up the nations, his enemies.

The rhinoceros being, perhaps, without exception, the most voracious of the brute creation, and capable, from its vast bulk, of consuming an enormous quantity of food, the devastating effects of those wars so successfully carried on by the Israelites against the nations of Canaan, are not unaptly compared to the insatiable appetite of that immense creature, never sated, and scarcely to be appeased. Waste and devastation follow in its track.

Bingley, in his "Animal Biography," states the quantity of food consumed by a young rhinoceros, five years old, brought to England in 1790. Its daily allowance was twenty-eight pounds of clover, the same weight of ship biscuit, and about fifteen pails of water. There is, perhaps, no animal living which eats and drinks so much as this huge and ungainly quadruped.

And shall break all their bones.

The ponderous weight of this mailed warrior of the forest, trampling upon the vanquished, and crushing his prostrate foes, sustains the beautiful congruity of the image, which is not only highly appropriate, but exceedingly graphic.

And pierce him through with his arrows.

The translation seems here to be defective as it does not make a consistent sense with what

precedes it. Whatever animal is understood by the word unicorn, the same objection will apply—the term “arrows” cannot be strictly consistent with it. The Hebrew literally is, “his transfixings shall transfix,” which is admirably significative of the fierce action represented under the idea of a rhinoceros. Nothing can escape the fury of his onset. He shall transfix every one whom he assails, for whatever he strikes, that dreadful weapon with which his snout is armed, penetrates and overthrows. His strength is so great that there is no evading such an issue. The horn of this animal is known, by those acquainted with his habits, to be a most deadly instrument of vengeance, and when he employs it in his fury, the tall camel and still more colossal elephant are frequently laid prostrate. ‘As he transfixes his foes with his horn, and tramples them to the dust under his ponderous body, so will the Israelites overcome those enemies who shall oppose their possession of that land covenanted to them under the divine promise made to their forefather Abraham, and renewed to his immediate descendants Isaac and Jacob.’

The whole of this description is highly animated, full of vigorous meaning, and the abrupt transition from the literal to the figurative, as from the exordium of this sacred song to the prophetic portion, is perfectly consistent with the fervid tone of prophecy, the divine oracles being always, or, for the most part, conveyed by vivid symbols, shadowing forth their signification more by forcible images than by

literal representations ; the latter, however, occasionally giving effect to the former, and supplying the clue to their interpretation. They afford, moreover, an agreeable relief to the embellished portions of sacred poetry, throwing them into stronger light and shadow, by which their meaning becomes the more prominent and consequently the more readily apprehended. The intention of the figures, however startling these may appear, is thus at once shown, and the whole rendered intelligible.

That the unicorn really exists, is still maintained by some modern travellers, as the following extract from the "Calcutta Government Gazette," August, 1821, will show. "Major Latter, who commands the Rungpore batallion, has lately had an opportunity of correcting the error into which naturalists have fallen by ascertaining that the unicorn actually exists in the interior of Thibet, and is well known to the inhabitants. This extraordinary fact was first communicated to Colonel Nichol, in February, 1820.

"In a Thibetian manuscript," says Major Latter, "containing the names of different animals, which I procured the other day from the hills, the unicorn is classed under the head of those whose hoofs are divided; it is called the one-horned tsopa. Upon inquiring what kind of animal it was, to our astonishment the person who brought me the manuscript described exactly the unicorn of the ancients. It is a native of the interior of Thibet, about the size of a tattoo, -a small native pony, fierce and

extremely wild, seldom if ever caught alive, but frequently shot, and the flesh used for food.

“ The person who gave me this information has repeatedly seen these animals, and eaten their flesh. They go together in herds, like our wild buffalos, and are very frequently to be met with on the borders of the great desert, about a month’s journey from Lhassa, in that part of the country inhabited by the wandering Tartars. Upon the person being asked if he could draw the figure of one, he did so upon paper, and considering the roughness of the execution, produced a striking similitude of the unicorn.

“ There are several collateral circumstances which tend to establish the fact of the unicorn being found in Thibet. Captain Turner, in his embassy to Tishoo Lomboo, mentions that the Bootan Rajah told him he had one alive at a short distance from Tassisudon. Bell, in his travels from Moscow to Pekin with the Russian embassy, describes a stray unicorn having been found near a place on the southern frontier of Siberia.

“ Major Latter has obtained the horn of a young unicorn from the Saohia Lamia, which is now before us. It is twenty inches in length; at the root it is four inches and a half in circumference, and tapers to a point; it is black, rather flat at the sides, and has fifteen rings, but they are only prominent on one side. It is nearly straight. Major Latter expects to obtain the head of the animal, the hoofs, and the skin, very shortly, which will afford positive proof of the

form and character of the tsopa, or Thibet unicorn."

With reference to the difficulty of ascertaining what animal is really meant by the reem of Scripture, translated unicorn, Michaelis observes: "Notwithstanding so many labours which truly learned men have undertaken, such as Bochart, Ludolph, and Schultens, to explain the import of the Hebrew word reem, or raam, that import remains still almost entirely concealed from us. The last mentioned writer seems to be the only one who has taken the right road for the discovery of the truth. Without loading the Hebrew language with a new animal, already well known to us, he contents himself with reporting whatever he has been able to collect from the Arabian writers relating to the word reem. He confesses, however, for himself, that after having considered what he produces, the animal referred to continues equally unascertained; because no one of the writers has given a methodical description of it, nor has mentioned those characters whereby it may be distinguished from other horned creatures, and especially from our bulls, when they are wild. However, what seems to be certain is, that Golius has badly translated the Arabic reem by *Dorcas*; that the animal denoted by this term belongs to the bull kind, with this difference, that it is absolutely impossible to tame it. We see also that the sacred text supposes a great resemblance between him and a bull, since Job is asked whether he would dare entrust the

reem with such and such labours as were performed by bullocks."

This is the strongest possible proof, as I humbly conceive, that the reem was *not* of the beeve kind. The questions put to Job are*—

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?
 Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow?
 Or will he harrow the valleys after thee?
 Wilt thou trust him because his strength is great?
 Or wilt thou leave thy labour to him?
 Wilt thou believe him that he will bring home thy seed,
 And gather it into thy barn?

In these clauses, it is evident that the reem is not identified with the bullock, but placed in opposition to it. It is asked simply if Job will attempt to employ the reem, a huge and untractable creature, in those labours which are familiar to the ox or animals of the beeve kind. Instead, therefore, of the sacred writer supposing a resemblance between the reem and a bullock, or bull, these animals are placed, as I apprehend, in direct contrast, leaving it to be inferred how utterly impracticable it would be to attempt to impose upon the fierce and indomitable reem those labours common to the gentle and patient ox. This passage clearly proves, to my mind, that the reem was *not* of the beeve race as Michaelis supposes, and confirms me in the supposition that it was the rhinoceros.

Returning now to Balaam's prophecy, we next find an allusion to a still more remote future, when the Israelites, having subdued their

* Chapter xxxix. 9—12.

enemies, shall obtain entire and peaceable possession of the promised land.

He couched, he lay down as a lion,
And as a great lion: who shall stir him up?

The similitudes employed in the second prediction are here repeated:—

He couched, he lay down as a lion;

that is, looking prospectively to the conquest of Canaan by the seed of Jacob, Balaam represents them as having so completely subdued their enemies, that, like a lion which had couched in the open field, sated with its prey, no one would dare molest them. They should be finally so dreaded by their foes that none would venture to attack them. Here is a fine specimen of verbal painting, if I may so characterize it; the whole nation of the Israelites is represented under the image of a fierce and powerful quadruped, overcoming every thing that opposes it. The repetition of the images, "lion," and "great lion," shows one of those extremely significant gradations which I have already so often pointed out as a distinguishing feature of Hebrew poetry. The prophecy concludes with a benedictory and maledictory announcement of great dignity, but which excited Balak to the fiercest exasperation:—

Blessed is he that blesseth thee,
And cursed is he that curseth thee!

In this pair of hemistichs, the present tense of the indicative mood is substituted for the third

person of the imperative, which is very significative, as it renders the operation of the blessing and curse, as it were, perpetually present. It brings the latter in all its terrible strength, the former in all its consoling influence, at once before the mind, not as matters to be, but which actually are; transferring the future to the present, and thus enduing it with the freshness of an immediate reality. It is an eloquent and effective mode of rendering the fact more vivid as well as more solemn, whilst the abrupt transition of tenses in the concluding distich, throws over the passage a costume of varied poetic grace.

CHAPTER XL.

Balaam's third prophecy, continued.

I SHALL now give Herder's version of Balaam's third prophecy, which, it will be observed, differs in some instances materially from our received translation of Holy Writ:—

Thus saith Balaam, the son of Beor,
Thus saith the man whose eyes are open,
He saith it who heareth the words of God,
Who seeth the vision of the Almighty,
Falleth into a trance, and seeth with open eye.
How beautiful are thy tents, O Jacob,
And thy dwelling-places, O Israel!
As rivers spread themselves abroad,
As gardens by the river's side,
As aloes which God hath planted,
As cedar trees beside waters.
Waters run from their fountains,
And many streams shall be his offspring.
His king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.
God hath brought him out of Egypt,
As of a wild bullock is his race:
He devoureth the nations his enemies;
He breaketh in pieces their bones,
And pierceth them with his arrows.
He coucheth and lieth down as a lion,
As a young lion, who shall rouse him up?
Blessed is he that blesseth thee,
And cursed is he that curseth thee.

I only desire to draw the reader's attention to the first couplet following the proem of this translation. Herder maintains the gradational parallelism by using the words *tents* and *dwell-*

ing-places, the latter term claiming a higher dignity of meaning than the former; and thus he confirms my views upon the subject of the superiority of tabernacles over tents.* In the original Hebrew, a distinction is evidently contemplated, and Herder as evidently meant to exhibit it. I think there is hardly a reader who would not give the precedence in dignity to *dwelling-places* above *tents*.

Our own poet Cowley has given a metrical version of this prophecy,† which, with all its imperfections, and these are no doubt many, when balanced against the extraordinary beauties of the original, even as rendered in our authorized translation, is, nevertheless, deserving of attention. I am sure, therefore, it will not be deemed an unjustifiable intrusion here, it being my purpose to exhibit the beauty of these divine poems in all their aspects of varied power.

How comely are thy tents, O Israel,
 (Thus he began) what conquests they foretel !
 Less fair are orchards in their summer pride,
 Adorned with trees, on some fair river's side ;
 Less fair are valleys, their green mantles spread,
 Or mountains, with tall cedars on their head.
 'Twas God himself (thy God,—who must not fear ?)
 Brought thee from bondage to be master here.
 Slaughter shall wear thee out, new weapons get,
 And death in triumph on thy darts shall sit.
 When Judah's lion starts up to his prey,
 And beasts shall hang their ears and creep away ;
 When he lies down, the woods shall silence keep,
 And dreadful tigers tremble at his sleep.
 Thy curser, Jacob, shall twice cursed be,
 And he shall bless himself that blesses thee.

Although Cowley's version does not rise to the simple, but nevertheless sublime elevation of

* See page 522.

†, Davideis, book i.

that given in our Bibles, it exhibits, notwithstanding that much of the original grandeur is abated, the distinguishing marks of true poetry, and is, moreover, an exceedingly intelligible exposition of the prophecy. The difficulty of transfusing the spirit of the Hebrew original, where the translator subjects himself to the trammels of rhyme, is so great, that in no one instance, to the best of my belief, has a version been produced that will stand the most distant comparison with the severe and chaste simplicity of the Hebrew, which our translators have certainly preserved with singular felicity. Cowley has altogether failed in exhibiting the parallelisms so beautifully prominent in the original; indeed, I suspect he was utterly unconscious of their existence; still, he has contrived to give a tolerably vigorous representation of the poetic *grace* of this prophecy, though he has failed in giving a faithful exhibition of its poetic *character*. In our translation the poetical characteristics are preserved with extraordinary accuracy, and by them alone it will be perceived that the whole poem is remarkable for vast copiousness of imagery, and prodigious elevation of thought. The figures are admirably diversified, and yet all bear that generic relation by which they greatly aid each other in adding the charm of consistency, as well as of variety, to those glowing hues of expression by which the descriptions are enlivened. There is wonderful animation in the pictures, which are made the representations of sublime and ennobling thoughts; and it is astonishing how fervid the descriptions are, when we consider their brevity and the extreme

condensation of language in which they are, in most instances, conveyed. So much is frequently expressed in one single hemistich, and yet with such chaste propriety of embellishment, that we are astonished at the depth, as well as the extraordinary comprehensiveness, of our impressions. In the parallelisms, moreover, are observed the nicest gradations of sense, which they at once strengthen and adorn. These parallelisms may be traced in almost every pair of lines, more or less developed, and nothing can exceed in severe but lofty grandeur, the two closing distichs.

Calmet, bearing testimony in favour of the sublimity of the Hebrew poets, says*—"There is no doubt but that the ancient Hebrews had their poets; and we have in the Bible a good number of canticles and other pieces of poetry. What seems very remarkable is, that their poetry is dedicated, by their application of it, to celebrating the greatness of God and his works. The Hebrew poets, so many of them, at least, whose works have come down to us, were men inspired of God. We find among them kings, lawgivers, prophets. Moses, Barak, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and most of the prophets, composed poems or pieces in verse, the most pompous, the most majestic, and the most sublime. The expression, the sentiments, the figures, the variety, the action, every thing is surprising."

Every reader of taste must concur with this testimony of an accurate and ripe scholar in

* Dictionary of the Bible, art. Poets.

favour of the beauties of Hebrew poetry, which I trust have been exhibited in these pages.

In Dr. Gregory's translation of Bishop Lowth's *Prælections*, the following metrical paraphrase occurs. It has certainly much less vigour than Cowley's, though somewhat more elegance.

BALAAM'S THIRD PROPHECY.

In proud array thy tents expand,
O Israel, o'er the subject land ;
As the broad vales in prospect rise,
As gardens by the water spread,
As cedars of majestic size,
That shade the sacred fountain's head.

Thy torrents shall the earth o'erflow,
O'erwhelming each obdurate foe :
In vain the mind essays to trace
The glories of thy countless race ;
In vain thy king's imperial state
Shall haughty Agag emulate.

His mighty God's protecting hand
Led him from Pharaoh's tyrant land :
Strong as the beast that rules the plain,
What power his fury shall restrain ?
Who dares resist, his force shall feel.
The nations see, and trembling, fly,
Or in the unequal conflict die ;
And glut with blood his thirsty steel.

With aspect keen he marked his prey—
He couched—in secret ambush lay.
Who shall the furious lion dare ?
Who shall, unmoved, his terrors see ?
Blest who for thee exalts the prayer,
And cursed the wretch who curseth thee !

How is the sublime simplicity of the original, as rendered in our admirable version, diluted, and its majestic vigour attenuated, in this metrical paraphrase !

It is remarkable to observe how this prophecy harmonizes with the predictions of Jacob relative

to the increase, prosperity, and settlement in Canaan of the twelve tribes. The man who pronounced these divine oracles, it will be recollected, was an alien from the race of Israel, and one altogether hostile to their success. The manner in which his predictions were fulfilled in the subsequent history of this distinguished people, shows, beyond question, that Balaam was a true prophet. Although he no doubt studied the arts of sorcery, a practice evidently in great vogue at that time, and was employed, not in the capacity of a prophet, but of a magician, by the sovereign of Moab, he nevertheless was endowed with the gift of foretelling future events, as has been already shown; and to the dismay of his royal employer, and to his own extreme disappointment, confirmed the blessings promised to Israel in previous prophetic announcements, which in the issue so signally came to pass. This is altogether one of the most extraordinary facts in sacred history, and nothing can be a stronger voucher for the truth of the transactions stated in that treasury of revelation, than the circumstance of their being authenticated by the testimony of the very man whose interest it was rather to have denied than confirmed them by his own recorded attestation.

It may be worth while, by way of contrast to this sublime prophecy of the inspired bard of Mesopotamia, to conclude this volume with an extract from Milton's hymn on Christ's nativity, a truly sublime subject; of which hymn a modern critic, with whom I can by no means concur, has said—"There is no doubt that the *prima stamina* of the bard's divine epics are

exhibited in this poem; but it has several peculiarities, which distinguish it from the poet's other compositions. It is more truly lyrical; the stanza is beautifully constructed; and there is a solemnity, a grandeur, and a swell of verse, which is magical. The images are magnificent, and they have this superiority of excellence, that none of them are merely descriptive, but have a mixture of intellectuality and spirituality." We shall see, by an extract, how far this tumid and indiscriminating praise is justified:—

The shepherds on the lawn,
 Or e'er the point of dawn,
 Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;
 Full little thought they than
 That the mighty Pan
 Was kindly come to live with them below:
 Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
 Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep:

 When such music sweet
 Their hearts and ears did greet,
 As never was by mortal finger strook;
 Divinely-warbled voice,
 Answering the stringed noise,
 As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
 The air, such pleasure loth to lose,
 With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.

This is the poetry of the immortal Milton; but how vastly inferior to that of the prophet of Pethor! Whatever may really be the merits of Milton's Hymn on the Nativity, so pompously extolled by Sir Egerton Brydges, of which the two stanzas just quoted form a part, I think it must be allowed by every reader of taste to be far—very far inferior to the poetry of the Bible.

END OF VOL. I.

